# Tom Turner's *Adventures* with the Radio

St. George Rathborne

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# TOM TURNER'S ADVENTURES WITH THE RADIO

*By*

ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

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Tom Turner's Adventures with The Radio

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# Tom Turner's Adventures with the Radio

## HEADED FOR CAT ISLAND

"LET me tell you—lugging all this dunnage—no joke on such a scorching hot day—you hear me talking, Tom Turner?"

"Better save your breath, Specs, old pal, because we're nearly at the boat-landing right now. Take a fresh grip, for it's all going to be over but the shouting, in a jiffy."

"Huh! this grub and other stuff—say, it weighs a ton, I reckon—more or less."

"My load's a right smart heavier one, I warrant you."

"Seems like it might be, Tom; and I'm just wondering what all you *have* got packed in those queer bags?"

"Lay-overs for meddlers—you'll learn all about it in good time—mighty precious stuff,

just the same, believe me. Well, here's the yacht at last."

"Huh! Too classic a name by half for the old *Bullbat* to sport, take it from me, Tom—no slur intended, you understand."

"Oh! I own up she's nothing to boast about, so far as looks go; then too, her sail is dingy, and horribly patched to beat the band—yes, and she never could be called a racer, either, being too clumsy by far; but you can't deny she's a *dependable* tub, just the same."

"As the word goes, yes, I reckon she is. But I'm glad we've finished the carry, because I'm nearly all in, and melting away."

With these last words the tall, angular boy, whose thin, spectacled face was a mass of rusty-looking freckles, dropped his numerous packages, and hastily producing a suspiciously dingy, red bandanna, proceeded to mop his streaming forehead.

Tom on his part had managed to get rid of his own burden, after which he stood there looking around in a disappointed fashion, and then gave a plain grunt, as of disgust.

"Shucks! I might have known he'd fail me in a pinch," was what he muttered. "Like as not he's just stopped on the way, to snatch a

few winks of sleep. He's always shy on that article."

"Who?" exploded the wondering Specs, apparently not fully in the confidence of his comrade.

"Why, Hop Hoofnagle, to be sure," the other boy explained, lifting his eyebrows, as if surprised to find that the usually keen-witted Specs had failed to recognize such a pointed description.

At that the Whittleby boy broke into a chuckle.

"You might have expected that, if you depended on Hop to get anywhere on time. I reckon if he was so lucky as to knock the ball over left-field fence for a home run, he'd loaf on the job of circling the bases, and wonder if he wasn't entitled to a little nap on the way. Well, are we going to be held up here, with the wind falling in the bargain, so it's doubtful whether your slow-poke boat can make Cat Island before dark comes on?"

There was a touch of real anxiety in the voice of Specs as he demanded this, and not without cause; to tell the truth he had no fancy for being becalmed out on the Gulf, with a

dark night in prospect, and always the possibility of a treacherous storm coming along to set the wild waves booming.

"N—no, that would be foolish, because nobody ever knows when Hop will show up. I'm a whole lot huffed about it, too, for I'll like enough need what he was promising to fetch along, if it came in the afternoon mail at the post office. But it may be I can carry on by some makeshift or other, and get results."

"You sure have got me guessing hard, Tom, just as you always do when you've a hen on," complained Specs, knitting his forehead in as near a frown as he was capable of producing; and which caused his thin freckled face to wrinkle in a queer way, until, as his mates were accustomed to declare, it resembled a "squeezed lemon."

"Never mind that just now, old pal; it'll all come out in the wash, and I'm only keeping my secret in hopes of giving you the surprise of your sweet young life. But I didn't think Hop would go back on me that way. I'll never trust such a sleepyhead again."

Specs snorted.

"I've heard that kind of talk before now," he observed, scornfully; "but Hop is so guile-

less, so full of a desire to help a fellow out, that we all forget his faults. He's such a big eater in the bargain, they say he always keeps one ear near the ground, listening for the dinner horn."

"It's no use bothering about waiting for him, I reckon," remarked Tom, after another look in the direction of the town; "so let's get all this duffle aboard somehow, and cast off. I looked the *Bullbat* all over this morning, and she hardly leaks any more than common. If the breeze holds out and doesn't shift, we ought to get to the hut on Cat Island long before night comes. Even at the worst I've fetched some flares to burn, if we have to make a landing in the dark."

"Wish we were there now, and getting a fire started, so as to cook a bully supper," sighed Specs, a little uneasily, as if some inward monitor warned him if impending trouble.

Tom only laughed at the idea, as he again picked up a portion of his late load, and proceeded to deposit the same in the roomy cockpit of the heavily built catboat.

Inside of five minutes everything had been accomplished, and the well-worn sail hauled up to fullest extent, so that with the peak halliards

made taut, the dingy-looking canvas gently fluttered in the soft breeze coming out of the west.

"All snug, Skipper!" called out Specs, seemingly more or less excited at the idea of starting out on their little adventure, that, hatched up by the fertile mind of Tom Turner, contained vast possibilities for surprises and thrills, such as enchant the average lad.

Tom only lingered to give a last despairing look back over the course they themselves had so lately traveled; then he dropped into the cockpit with its mass of dunnage, while the eager Specs hurriedly released the boat's cable.

A short time afterwards and the doughty *Bullbat* was moving down the little bay, her nose pointed toward the open Gulf of Mexico. The breeze held good, and inside of another half hour the two adventurous boys found themselves well off shore, and sailing with a free wind over their starboard quarter.

Specs delighted to lie well up forward, where he could drink in the musical gurgle of the water running along the sides, after that blunt prow of the big weatherly sailboat had parted it.

"This is the life!" he remarked for the third time, grinning in his odd fashion at the boy in the cockpit.

"Just the same, Specs," he was told, "it might be as well to get rid of this duffle—chuck it in the cabin any-old-way, so's to give the man at the wheel elbow room."

"Sure thing, Tom," came the ready answer, for Specs Whittleby always tried to make himself "useful, as well as ornamental" when on an outing with a comrade. "Whew! that one package is some weighty, for a fact; feels like you might have a bunch of iron, or lead, inside?"

He looked inquiringly at his chum, as if inviting confidences; but the discreet Tom only grinned, and shook his head in the negative.

"Well, mebbe I have, Specs; you never can tell what truck I'm apt to lug around with me; because I'm always head-over-ears busy with some slick game that I've got on tap. Don't throw anything down hard, because you might smash some of my calculations by damaging my stuff. But I'm sorry to say that old breeze is getting mighty weak all of a sudden. If it keeps on falling for the next half-hour our goose will be cooked, all right."

"You sure do give me a pain when you say that," whimpered Specs, losing his almost perpetual grin. "I don't see any fun in having to lie out here on the open Gulf all night, or nearly killing ourselves trying to creep along foot by foot, using those long oars you keep aboard. So I hope the wind isn't going back on us for keeps, that's all."

After he had cleared the cockpit of their camp duffle, Specs went back to his former lounging place, and carried on a desultory conversation with the boy at the wheel; for Tom had long ago replaced the ancient tiller with something more modern, and that gave him a little right to term his clumsy craft a "yacht."

Another spell of time crept along, with the afternoon now far more than half spent. Tom's worst fears had been realized, for the breeze gradually died down to fitful puffs of air, and for the most part of the time the boat simply wallowed in the long waves, the boom swinging groaningly from side to side, the sail sagging disconsolately, from lack of a filling wind.

"Tough luck, I say," grumbled Specs, finally sitting up, and casting a querulous look

around the horizon. "And there's the sun gone behind that cloud, too. All we can hope for now is that the wind may spring up fresh from another quarter, and help us along our merry way. We're in the doldrums, all right, and it's just as impossible to go back as forward, even if we can see land in the direction of Gulport, our home town. But what makes you look so serious, Tom; is there anything wrong that you've discovered?"

"Only that the wind you're hoping for is going to come along fast enough—fact is, we're bound to get a whole lot more of the same than will be good for our peace of mind."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Specs, now on his feet, with an arm around the mast, and looking in every direction but the right one.

"Those clouds are coming up fast from the west, you can notice," asserted Tom, trying to keep his voice steady in the crisis, so as not to alarm his chum more than was actually necessary; "I'd say we were in for a nasty squall of some sort; anyhow, a blow that's bound to give us a heap of trouble to keep our canvas from going into tatters. Keep cool, Specs; and face the music!"

## CHAPTER II

### WHEN THE SQUALL STRUCK

AT LEAST Specs Whittleby was no coward, even if his cheecks did go white, and his hand showed signs of trembling, as he hastily slid along the side of the cabin, until he could join his chum in the cockpit of the boat.

"Then we're in for a tough spell, seems like, eh, Tom?" he asked, with a decided husky tremor in his usually strong voice.

"Sorry to say it looks that way," admitted the other; "tho' if luck favors us that squall may spin off another quarter, and leave us the stiff breeze we're hoping for."

"But — we oughtn't to take anything for granted, I'd say, Tom?"

"That wouldn't be the Turner way of meeting trouble," the skipper observed, with a boyish touch of pride in both voice and manner. "All we can do it take in our canvas to the third reef-points, and then hang on while the blow lasts. The rest depends on the *Bullbat* being able to keep afloat in a heavy sea."

"I've never up to now been out on the Gulf in a *real* storm," admitted Specs, uneasily, though by the way he kept his teeth clenched it was evident he was holding down his natural fears with a strong hand. "I've often tried to imagine how it would feel to be in such a fix; and now things seem heading that way. Whew!"

He stood there staring hard in the quarter where those ominous-looking black clouds had covered the face of the westering sun, and were mounting upward with astounding rapidity. By now the water no longer had its customary dark greenish hue; when the heavens clouded over it took on a sombre cast that made things seem doubly appalling.

"We'd better get busy while we have the chance," suggested Tom, well knowing that such sudden summer storms can race over the water with amazing swiftness once they strike. "Drop the peak, and then the throat halliards, so we can get all the sail stowed away save only the smallest fraction—just enough left to make sure she'll mind her helm."

Both boys worked feverishly, ever and again casting glances full of concern in the direction

of the west, where the sky looked so black and menacing.

"Queer how we never dreamed of such a thing coming along, when we were starting off," observed Specs, at one time, as he tightened a reef point with unaccustomed vigor.

"There was nothing to give warning, that I could see," replied the other, as if bound to defend himself against any suspicion of carelessness. "These summer squalls sometimes burst in gulf vessels with scant time to get their canvas stowed; many a schooner has been wrecked that way, I've heard. Now I wish I'd done what I promised to do last time we were out in the *Bullbat*—replaced these old reef-points with new cords."

"You're afraid they won't hold when the wind gets busy, and blows great guns—is that it, Tom?"

"Well, the pull is something fierce, you understand," came the answer. "Here's a bit of cord in my pocket that might help out some; let's make use of it any old way we can, Specs."

Both of them felt a trifle easier in their minds when the fresh cord had been wrapped around the boom, and its accumulation of compressed canvas. It was Tom's hope that by

making good use of the fraction of sail left aloft he might in the event of a crisis bring the boat around, and keep her heading into the giant billows that would be sweeping them along in their uncharted path.

"If only we had something to serve as a sea anchor," he told his mate, "I'd get it overboard at the bow, and hope for the best. It would act as a drag, you know, and keep her from yawing so she'd turn on her beam-ends, and be rolled over with the next wave."

"I've heard about that," admitted the eager Specs; "how about those oars you keep aboard for an emergency?"

"We might lash them together, and then fasten the bunch to the cable, paying it out to the limit," agreed Tom. "There's one lying alongside the cabin here to port and the other to starboard. Fetch them here, with the bits of rope that hold them in place. I don't know just how it will work, but we can't afford to lose any chances, you see. A sea-drag has saved others in a storm, and it may do the same for us."

"If only we can keep from foundering till the blow passes by, it would be all right," observed Specs, his lips trembling as he spoke;

for the very thought of finding themselves left struggling amidst a yeasty foam of angry waters was enough to chill his youthful heart, and make him swallow hard in the effort to maintain a proper show of courage.

"That's right," assented Tom, bravely, "for a squall is generally short-lived; and having passed is apt to leave a good sailing breeze behind it. We'll do our level best, and leave the rest."

"Right-o!" said Specs, who evidently was considerably influenced by the logic of his more fearless companion.

They worked feverishly, and in the end managed to lash the pair of long ash oars together, attaching them to the end of the stout cable, where on occasion an anchor was used. Tom was careful that the rope should be tied about the middle of the bundle, in order to insure as much of a drag as possible. Perhaps he remembered what a decided "pull" resulted when he had thus tied a small stick to his fishing line, and allowed the current of a stream to carry it along with zigzag switches, he making out to have a tugging bass hooked.

There was really nothing more they could do now, to add to their feeling of confidence.

When they looked out upon the vast waters surrounding them on every side, and in imagination saw the gulf in the throes of a wicked storm, it was a most difficult thing for either boy to feel any degree of hope that all would turn out well.

"She's whooping it up already there in the northwest!" suddenly ejaculated Tom, pointing a quivering finger as he spoke.

Sure enough they could distinguish a long white line that marked the advance of the fierce wind—a sailor would say the sea was "carrying a bone in its teeth," just as a dog might. It was a fascinating spectacle, much more terrifying than anything along similar lines they had eve witnessed; for it made all the difference in the world whether the swift advance of such a squall were observed when standing safely ashore, with shelter close at hand, or out on the open gulf, aboard a puny catboat with rotten sails, and subject to more or less leakage alongside the centerboard well.

Around them the gulf lay almost calm, save for a long swell that kept the dangling boom creaking continuously, as though in complaint. Blacker than ever the water looked, as if it were a mile deep instead of the shallow gulf

near the shore, where they were accustomed to do most of their sailing.

"Ugh! listen to it begin to howl, will you, Tom?" quavered Specs.

There was really no need for him to call the attention of his chum to the grumbling wails that had begun to well up from the region of the squall, since Tom had heard them for almost the last full minute; nor did they sound any sweeter to his ears than to those of Specs Whittleby.

"We'll soon know how things are going to serve us, anyway!" he was saying, half to himself. "It sure was foolish, starting out on such a hot day, when the chances were three to one we'd have a big blow; but the mischief's done, and it can't be remedied. If the boat does founder it's goodbye to my whole radio outfit,—yes, and mebbe goodbye to us both as well!"

"Don't talk like that, Tom," begged Specs, wanly. "I'm depending on you to keep my courage up, don't you understand? It isn't like you to lie down on any job, and take your medicine!"

"I'm not meaning to, either, old pal," assured the other, grimly. "You'll find me hold-

ing on to the last notch; if I go down it'll be with both arms working like all get-out. Let's hope for the best, and pull hard to keep afloat. Steady now, and don't get washed out of the cockpit if that first fierce wave comes aboard, as it likely will!"

Both of them shut their jaws tightly, and nerved themselves to meet the coming shock as valiantly as possible. Just as Tom had intimated, there was nothing further either of them could do so as to enlarge their chances of escape; everything depended on the staunchness of the boat, and how that extemporized sea-anchor or drag would work—beyond that they were in the hands of Providence.

Now the wall of water was rushing swiftly toward them. How threatening it looked, how magnified by the fears that welled up within their breasts! Still, all things considered, they both met the crisis with a bravery that did them great credit.

The billow struck, and instantly the boat started to rear upward like a racing steed attempting to clear a barrier. Tom held his breath in dreadful suspense, fearful lest the clumsy craft be hurled completely over by the force of the impact. Much water did come

aboard, but to his exceeding great joy the boat failed to founder, and almost in a twinkling they found themselves being whirled along amidst the raging sea, now plunging down into a deep trough and anon quickly hurled to the top of a billow.

Thanks to the wonderful sea-anchor they kept bow-on to the gale, and it was to this fact they owed much of their safety, Tom was convinced. It was all they could do to keep on their feet, and already both of them had received severe bruises, to which however they paid no attention, in all the excitement of that dreadful first minute when gripped in the furious clutch of the white squall.

"Oh! listen! what is that whooping noise?" shouted Specs, managing to grip his comrade by an arm. "Seems like it's inside the cabin, too, Tom! Do you think we've sprung a *leak*, and that's the water coming in?"

Tom himself had an expression of wonder, almost awe upon his face, for he too had heard the mysterious sounds, and could not understand what caused them. The wind was shrieking, and the waves making a vast splashing as they played with the little old catboat left helpless in their grasp; but those sounds with-

in the low cabin were of an entirely different calibre from all the others.

"Look, and find what's going on—I've got to keep a tight grip on the wheel, and can't leave it!" called out Tom at the top of his sturdy voice.

Specs in duty bound had taken a first step toward the double door of the low cabin when something happened—the wooden barrier was hurriedly parted, and a round, frightened face thrust through the opening!

## CHAPTER III

### IN DEADLY PERIL

"HOP Hoofnagle!" almost shrieked Specs, staring rigidly, as though under the impression he must be seeing a ghost.

Tom was able to better obtain a grip on the situation, for he almost immediately bawled out:

"Say, have you been fast asleep in that cabin all this while, and neither of us dreaming of such a thing?"

"Py chimineddy! dot's me!" shouted the owner of the round face, and the eyes that seemed to be sticking out with sudden alarm. "Pud vich vay didt ve get here already yet?"

Hop was in reality Gottlieb Hopkins Hoofnagle, one of the school chums of Tom and Specs. His folks were from the Old Country; but during the late World War they had again and again proved themselves true-blue Americans, and were held in high repute among the town people of Gulfport.

The stout boy had had the misfortune years back to permanently injure his left leg, so that ever since then he limped just a little; with such a suggestive middle name it can readily be understood how his cronies quickly christened him "Hop" for short, and so it had been ever since.

He was good-natured, and fairly devoted to every kind of boyish sport, although too heavily built, and too apt to stumble, to make a gilt-edged athlete. Known as a voracious feeder, and ever watching for a chance to indulge in this weakness, at the same time he had gained the reputation of being always just a bit behind in the matter of lost sleep. Some of his comrades were even mean enough to hint that Hop could "doze" while on third base during a hotly contested ball game, and he supposed to be guarding that bag.

Just then it looked as though he must have been suddenly aroused when the catboat was jicked up by that initial billow, and slammed down with a most violent thud. Imagine a chap going peacefully to sleep in the cabin of his friend's boat, expecting to awaken when Tom turned up; and then being so rudely roused by the gymnastics of the craft!

There was another peculiar thing about this Hoofnagle boy—at school, in recitation, and elsewhere he could use just as good United States language as any one in the room; but there were occasions when he had some queer streak assume dominion over him, and at such times delighted in lapsing back into a jargon that would make folks believe he had only lately come over from Holland, or the Rhine country.

"You didn't find me waiting for you," continued Tom, bent on finding out the truth, although it hardly seemed worth while, when such perilous conditions surrounded them on every side; "and so you thought to creep into the cabin for a little snooze among my blankets?"

The other wagged his head, but not a vestige of a grin accompanied his admission of the fact; truth to tell Hop was so badly rattled by the sight of those monster billows sweeping past the dragging catboat, and the knowledge that somehow he no longer could depend on having the firm shore close at hand, to which he might flee, that he almost lost his speech.

"Why, we've been afloat a heap more than a whole hour," Tom told him severely, at the

same time trying his best to register disgust by a look on his face, to which however the delinquent paid not the least attention, with all that sea running alongside, and the rain commencing to beat down in sheets.

"Oxcuse me, off you blease, put idt vould nodt pe sooch a surprises off I was asleep, vich I never do seem to make up quite," he managed to say. "Put dell me, vat's der matter here, undt do ve all of us get drownded? I never yet saw me sooch vildness in a storm, undt dot's no choke either."

"We were left without wind to fill our sail while on the way to Cat Island," explained Tom who always had a corner of his heart for honest Hop of the good intentions, "and this rip-snorter bore down on us. That's what they call a drag, or sea-anchor we've got to windward, to keep us from broaching to, and being keeled over. Get that, Hop?"

"As blain as der nose on your face, Tom. Ven I gets me some skakings-up in dese gabins I dinks it might pe an earthquake; put now I see I've got me anodder guess goming. Ach!" as a huge wave boarded the boat, and drenched them all good and plenty, for Hop had incautiously allowed himself to draw out of his

shelter into the big cockpit, "dot's der way to make a sleepy-eyes get a move on. Off my vader knowed how, he'd have a pucket of vater hanging over my ped, and tip it ven he'd called me for der third time."

At another time the boys might have laughed long and heartily upon hearing more about Hop's family troubles at home; since it was well known how his sire had been hard put to discover some effective means for routing the sleepy one out of his snug covers when all sorts of calling and vague threats had been unavailing. But surrounded as they were by such hovering perils neither Tom nor yet Specs had the heart to even chuckle.

"Dell me, is dere nuttings for me to do to hellup?" demanded the ever willing Hop; for of a truth he was almost afraid to creep back into that tossing low-roofed cabin; like most people Hop believed he could stand any kind of impending peril all the better by being allowed to see what he was up against.

Tom Turner shook his head, in the negative.

"Better crawl inside again, and hold the fort, Hop," he advised. "We'll have to stay out here to keep the boat as steady as we can, and try to make her pull through each big wave.

You'd only be in the way. If anything happens we'll warn you in good time for you to get out!"

Hop looked anything but happy at the prospect held before him; nevertheless he realized that this was Tom's boat, and he an unwelcome and uninvited passenger aboard the same, subject to the despotic will of the skipper. So, shaking his big head, all unwillingly he did as he was bidden, disappearing behind the double doors of the boat cabin.

Tom made sure to see that these last were hurriedly closed, for he sensed that another hurtling billow was threatening to engulf them, when the cockpit was apt to be flooded, and much water would pass into the cabin, if an opening existed.

This sudden and startling appearance of a third party aboard the ill fated *Bullbat* was was not calculated to make any particular difference in their condition; if the worst came about it would only mean another family in dear old Gulfport—how Specs seemed to see every familiar corner of the place, now that there was a dire possibility he might never know it again—would be cast into mourning for a lost son.

"Which way are we drifting before the wind, Tom?" called Specs, close to his companion's ear.

"Almost due sou-east, as near as I can make out in all this gloom and whooping sea," came the ready answer, proving how the Turner boy was apt to keep those keen wits of his about him, no matter what the emergency, or the provocation to get what Specs would call "rattled."

"But Cat Island stands off nearly south of Gulfport?" the thin boy observed, it might be a little reproachfully.

"True for you, Specs, but it happens we're not going to make port on that same bully little island this cruise, from the way things look right now."

"Tom, tell me truly, what chance have we got to land *anywhere?*" continued Specs, shuddering to hear the rush and roar of all that water, in the midst of which their small cockle shell of a boat appeared as minute as a chip from a carpenter's plane.

"Ask me something easy, and I'll try to give you a proper answer," was what Tom told him; and then taking pity on poor nervous Specs he hastened to add consolingly: "We're

getting along famously so far, you want to remember, and if nothing unlucky happens we'll stand a good chance of pulling through, right side up with care. My greatest worry is about those reef-points, for if they burst away, goodbye to our precious old canvas. You can see how it catches every gust of wind, and strains like a wild horse trying to break loose from a rope."

"Oh!" cried Specs almost immediately after his comrade spoke in this manner, "my heart nearly jumped up in my throat that time, for I thought it was all over with our sail. If only the wind would drop a little it might hold, and by degrees we could run out this gale. It must be night by now, for I can't see more than a boat's length away, and then only glimpse foaming waters leaping in the air."

They continued to hold on with the coming of each succeeding billow, in hopes it might be the last great wave. By now Tom mentally figured the old *Bullbat* must have been carried many miles out of her course, and doubtless land was beyond the keenest vision, even on a bright day.

What lay ahead, and the nature of the fate awaiting them, not even the most vivid imag-

ination could more than guess; it was enough to grimly exercise patience, and try to keep from giving way to despair.

Several times had Hop, quivering with the suspense he could not abate, thrust his head out of cover, and eagerly demanded to know the worst; on each occasion Tom Turner had hastened to tell him there was no material change in the conditions; and gently but firmly thrust the alarmed one back in his "coop," where he could cower, and listen to all that dreadful racket, allowing his imagination to have full play.

It seemed to Specs that the passing minutes must be long hours, so great was the suspense, so near them Death was riding on white-maned horses. He actually suffered such tortures he could in imagination believe his hair must have turned snow-white; and mentally pictured what the home folks would say when they saw him. Then it came with a shock that perhaps they would never again look on his face! This dreadful fancy made him shiver, and shut his teeth into his lip until it fairly bled—so hard was it to stiffle the groan that tried to find utterance.

Then suddenly, without the least warning, there came an upheaval that caused the boat to almost rear up, and topple over; an unusually severe burst of wind had rushed down upon them just as an enormous billow struck.

"Oh! it's come, Tom!" shrieked the abject Specs; but no one heard what he said, or at least paid the slightest attention to his utterance; for at that same moment with a screech the tugging sail broke away its moorings, and ripped down the center as though a sharp knife had severed the canvas; while the shock of the dire calamity caused the *Bullbat* to keel over to port as though to capsize!

## CHAPTER IV

### AFTER THE STORM

IT WAS a dreadful sensation for the three boys when the stumpy catboat, reeling like a drunken man, threatened to keel over on her beam ends. Had such a dire happening taken place they must have been precipitated into the wildly surging Gulf, and the chances of their escaping death would have proven very small indeed.

But again did the gallant old *Bullbat* prove staunch and steadfast, for after a brief period of balancing in an undecided fashion, while Tom and his two comrades held on in desperation, the boat once more fell back on an even keel.

No one attempted to say anything, for they had been holding their breath in an agonized way while in such peril, so that it was all they could do to recover their wind. The clumsy craft continued to wash along before waves that bore it aloft, and then allowed it to roll down into valleys, where they seemed about

to be utterly overwhelmed by the towering billows.

All at once Specs gave utterance to a wild whoop that startled both the others. As they rushed up a steep incline, and reached the top of a wave they could see that the excited boy was pointing overhead.

"A star!" he was shrilling, with all his vigor, "there, two of 'em, don't you see? The bally storm's done for, seems like!"

This information, which both the other boys verified by looking heavenward, served to give them a delightful little tremor in the region of their hearts. Despair no longer utterly gripped, for a new hope had come with the discovery that the clouds were breaking, and the worst was apparently over.

Still they might expect the billows to continue buffeting their devoted boat for quite a long time; since the influence of these subtropical storms on the great Gulf lasts for hours after the sky has become studded with silvery stars, or in the daytime the glorious sun shown his smiling face.

They continued to crouch there, Hop Hoofnagle with the others; for once he broke loose from the confined cabin it was utterly useless to

attempt to influence the poor chap to return to his quarters, which had become virtually a prison in his mind.

Nor could Tom or Specs really blame him for not wanting to be shut up in the low cabin, with a thousand fears racking his imagination, every time the boat rushed down into a valley. Besides that it was anything but a cheerful place, since considerable sea had managed to find entrance, either by way of the closed doors, or else through leaks alongside the centerboard well, the presence of which latter were not unknown to the owner of the boat, and had been adding more or less to the burden of his anxieties.

"Some wet inside, isn't it, Hop?" he bellowed in the other's ear, as if on pins and needles concerning something or other.

"Mine gootness! I should say it was vet!" burst out the Hoofnagle boy. "Undt dose packages, pelieve me, dey are getting vetter dan anydings too."

"That's bad news, Hop," exclaimed Specs; "for if we have the great luck to get ashore *somewhere,* we've got to depend on that same grub to keep things going. I sure hope it isn't bound to be all ruined!"

Hop heard this bad news with silence; it always gave him a pain to know that precious food, which he loved so well, was in danger of being lost, strayed, or stolen."

"Well," remarked Tom, still anxious, it seemed, but with a faint hope that after all things might not be as black as they look, "I took special pains to wrap most of *my* stuff in waterproof coverings; and unless the cabin is actually flooded, so that they're swimming around, I reckon some of the same may come through. Even a little water would ruin my radio outfit, you know, Specs. I have to wash off the panel with alcohol, and be mighty careful to keep the nearest window closed at night, or when there's a chance of a shower."

This was certainly a long speech for Tom to make, under such conditions as surrounded them; but his heart was full of his pet hobby, and by raising his voice to almost a shout he managed to make his mates hear what he had to communicate.

So the time dragged along, minutes turning into an hour, and then two of them, according to Tom's estimation. He founded his calculations on the celestial clock overhead, since the clouds had entirely vanished, and stars decked

the heavens in endless numbers. Tom had long ago learned to notice everything around him on the earth, the waters, and in the universe above. By his knowledge of the planets and constellations he could figure very closely concerning the time of night, even though as on the present occasion there was no moon in sight to guide him.

So too, had he been lost upon a wide plain, he would have had no difficulty in deciding where the various points of the compass lay, and in this fashion could by degrees pick out a course that was likely to take him back to camp, or home."

They seldom addressed one another, because it proved too great an effort, for all of them felt quite exhausted, what with the tense anxiety, and the way they had been buffeted around by those mountainous billows that delighted to play at nine pins with their luckless craft.

But one thing certain, the sea was surely subsiding, for the waves no longer broke over them. Not that such a thing mattered greatly, for every fellow was wet to the skin by now; nevertheless, it gratified Tom considerably to know the worst seemed over.

Specs had even managed to creep along, and secure footing alongside the reeling mast. His intention was to profit by such an elevated position, so he might see what lay around.

But after holding this precarious position for ten minutes or so, with very little success, he deigned to return once more to the company of his mates in the cockpit.

"Noddings doing, Specs?" queried the eager Hop, as the other slid down at his side.

"All I could see was rolling waves," came the answer; "some folks might call it a pretty marine view, but as for me, a glimpse of dry land would be the finest thing going."

Shortly afterwards he turned to Tom and tried to "pump" him.

"I take it we've kept heading southeast most of this time, eh, Tom?"

"Pretty much that way, but right now it's a point or two nearer east," the Turner boy assured him, always willing to impart any knowledge he may have possessed to his comrades of camp or cruise.

"Say southeast by east, or sou-sou-east," continued Specs, possibly anxious to show the eagerly listening Hop how proficient he could

be with regard to the thirty-two Mariner's Compass points.

"You're on, Specs," assented Tom; "but what have you got in mind?"

"Do you happen to remember, from studying the chart of the gulf, whether there are any islands between us and the west Florida coast around the region of Cedar Keys, or even down toward Tampa Bay?"

Tom considered a minute before replying to this direct question.

"I wish I could say that the chart was fairly studded with islands," he finally remarked, "but it doesn't happen that way. Truth to tell our chances for running across any land, until we cover hundred miles—if the old tub keeps afloat that long—are mighty slim."

"Huh! it's plain to be seen then we're in for a night of it," Specs ruefully admitted. "But to tell you the truth I'm bothered more about what our folks must be thinking right now, than over our own danger.'

Indeed, that was exactly what Tom himself had been considering regretfully. He could shut his eyes and mentally see a picture of the well remembered and cheery sitting-room at home, alight with the electric glow, his father

attempting after the storm to listen in at the radio which he, Tom, had built with his own hands and at the least possible expense for necessary equipment; while his mother sat sewing, every now and again letting the work drop in her lap as her fears concerning the safety of her boy, out on the wide Gulf, clutched at her motherly heart.

Yes, undoubtedly three mothers were likely to pass a bad night, unable to get a dreadful picture out of the disturbed minds, in which they could see the wreck of the *Bullbat,* and the struggling forms of their dear ones amidst the surges of the wild waters.

Still more time dragged along, and all of the boys began to feel drowsy on account of their exhaustion. Specs had crept into the cabin, and when he came out it was in possession of a small box of crackers, and some cheese, which they devoured greedily, despite the fact of the food being partly soaked in salty brine. But the food did them considerable good, since hunger has much to do with failing strength.

About this time they made a discovery—the constant dragging motion finally managed to loosen the sea-anchor, so that it had slipped the cords, or else the latter becoming weakened

through saturation had given way; at any rate the boat started to turn so that she rolled quite threateningly in each succeeding trough of the sea.

Tom succeeded after considerable effort, in managing to get her head on, and by manipulating the rudder kept her that way, which seemed much more natural and satisfactory than drifting along stern first.

The noise of the pounding billows had gradually died down, so that none of the boys any longer paid the least attention to the sound, for it held no dire threat for their safety. Indeed, it rather soothed their senses, and lulled them; already there was Hop with his head on his chest, and undoubtedly calmly slumbering, just as though in his own little bed at home, and oblivious to all his strange surroundings.

Perhaps Tom secretly envied the sleeper for once, and his ability to put dull care aside when the little god of slumber wooed him on. Still he continued to hold on to the wheel, and keep the boat on its rolling course.

He was again thinking of the home folks, and picturing them too worried to seek their rest, when Specs suddenly gripped hold of his arm, and shrilly exclaimed:

"Listen! would you Tom; whatever do you reckon that noise is dead ahead? Am I dreaming, or can it mean waves breaking on some shore? Oh! what luck, if only we are heading on some sort of island after all!"

## CHAPTER V

### WASHED ASHORE

"BY CHIMINEDDY! dot sounds goot to me poys!"

Apparently Hop Hoofnagle had awakened in time to hear part of what Specs was saying, and thus chimed in with his exultant explosion.

Tom, now thoroughly aroused, and excited in the bargain at the prospect of a possible landing, had been listening. He quickly announced his opinion as to the origin of the strange and cheerful sounds which the wakeful Specs had been the first to notice.

"Unless I'm away off in my reckoning, boys, that's just what it means," Tom remarked, eagerly enough. "Some sort of land is there ahead of us—it may be an island, or even the mainland; though I fail to see how that could be, for we're not heading north at all, and couldn't reach Cedar Keys for a whole day and night at the rate we're drifting now."

"There's something more you ought to know, Tom," resumed Specs. "I had just glimpsed

it, and was meaning to tell you, when that pounding noise caught my attention, and excited me a heap. I chanced to be looking off there to the west, and saw *a light* over the water."

"That sounds mighty interesting to me, Specs," admitted Tom; "for it means we're not alone in this section of the Gulf, as we may have thought. Go on, and tell us more about that same light."

"It seemed to be moving up and down, just like it might be used as a signal to some one on shore; made me think of the old days we read about, when Blackbeard, and Gomez, with other buccaneers and pirates infested the Spanish Main, and cruised along the coast of Florida."

Tom laughed right out at the romantic conceit of his chum.

"Hardly anything like that, I reckon, Specs; more than apt to turn out to be some Greek sponger from down Tarpon Springs way; or a fisherman's boat, trying to make harbor, after being knocked around in the squall."

"Well, no matter, it means that *somebody* is cruising around these parts, and if only we can make connections, we needn't be worried

about getting safe back home again, even if we have to tow the *Bullbat* all the way."

Apparently Specs was feeling a hundred per-cent better, now that the storm was over, and the fortunes *had* taken *such* an upward bound. Hop Hoofnagle too displayed unusual animation for him and hung upon every word spoken by his companions.

"We're getting nearer all the time," suggested Specs, presently.

"That's right," assented Tom, "and we'd better try to arrange some sort of program, so's to save the boat, as well as ourselves, if we have the good luck to be washed ashore."

"Dot iss righto," quickly observed Hop, "for idt vould pe sooch a disappointment if ve gets us to land, undt has to go hungry all der vile, pecause our grub idt goes oudt to sea once more yet."

"We must get the stuff out of the cabin, and have it ready to carry ashore," Tom told them, in his decisive way; for since he was the skipper, and really in charge of the adventure, he felt it was up to him to devise the plan of campaign—certainly that could never be left to such a slow thinker as Hop; and even Specs seemed to be looking only to their

scrambling ashore, regardless of future troubles.

This was speedily accomplished, after which Tom himself went forward to hurriedly pull in the cable rope, and then attach its end to the heavy anchor that might have been dropped overboard and lost in all the plunging, only that it was made fast by a stout strand of rope to a cleat in the bow.

"If we are washed on to the beach," he explained to the other pair, "we must carry the anchor as far up the shore as possible, so the retreating waves can't cheat us out of our boat. Get that, both of you fellows?"

"Sure thing," replied Specs, visibly excited, but this time pleasantly, and not on account of hovering perils. "Say, all this makes me think of old Robinson Crusoe getting stores ashore from the wreck that was cast up on his bully island. That's what we'll be bound to do, only there oughtn't to be any need of a raft, strikes me."

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched, Specs; it's a poor business, I've learned. First of all we must make sure of our own safety; and next to that take care of the *Bullbat*."

"You pet my life dot's so, Tom," gurgled Hop, his whole manner expressing the utmost appreciation for the suggestions put forth by the skipper.

Judging from the loud sound of the waves breaking on the shore, they must by now be close in; though as yet none of them had been able to discover the first sign of land ahead, despite all the straining of their eyesight. But then it was one of those intensely black nights often met with between moons, down along the great Mexican Gulf, and their lack of success in locating the shore line could be readily understood.

"I can see white moving objects, now running along, and then backing up," presently announced the keen sighted Turner boy; "which I reckon now must be the waves on some sort of beach. So get ready, fellows, to go over the sides as soon as she strikes bottom, and everybody push with might and main. Then when I give the word we'll get the anchor overboard, and lug it just as far up the beach as the cable will stretch. After that we can come back and try to carry our duffle ashore.

"Py shimminy grickets! undt dere iss no foolishnesses apout dot programme, Tom, mine

poy!" cried the delighted Hop, slapping the other heartily on his back, in an excess of admiration—also joy over the pleasing prospect that if all went well they might even hope to soon have a warming fire going, and better yet, some food in process of cooking!

"It's no dream, boys," Tom was now calling, "because I feel sure I can glimpse something dark above those breaking waves, which might be trees, for all I can say. Ready everybody!"

He had hardly spoken when the onward progress of the *Bullbat* was suddenly brought to a halt—each boy could feel the shock as her keel buried itself in the sand.

"Now—over with you!" cried Tom, suiting the action to the word, and jumping recklessly into the creamy water alongside.

Specs and Hop were hardly a second behind him in their plunge, though the latter, after his customary clumsy fashion, did manage to catch his foot on the edge of the cockpit, which caused him to take a header, disappearing entirely, to come up spluttering, and striking out wildly.

But Tom, was equal to the occasion, possibly half anticipating such a result, remembering

Hop's usual method of doing things; and his hand shooting out, took a firm hold of the swimming chap's shoulder, steering him alongside the stranded catboat.

"Up forward everybody, and drag the heavy anchor off the deck!" came the skipper's order, which being in line with the arranged programme, was readily carried out.

A cable's length up the beach, and just above the last line of running water, they buried one of the prongs of the anchor in the sand, making it as firm as possible.

"That's bound to hold her safe!" announced Tom, breathing hard after his exertions. "Now to get our stuff ashore."

Accordingly they returned to the boat, and Tom clambering aboard commenced to load some of the luggage belonging to Specs and himself on the shoulders of his mates. When they had started off together he jumped overboard again, and took especial pains to pack a certain well wrapped-up and weighty bundle on his own head. Not for anything would Tom have allowed his foot to slip, lest he meet with a lamentable disaster in plunging his treasured radio outfit under those racing waves of the Gulf, and do irreparable damage to the same.

They took care to deposit their packages well out of reach of the most ambitious wavelets, and then once more made a journey to the *Bullbat* for the balance of the cargo.

When this job was successfully completed both Specs and Hop showed high spirits. Apparently all their late concern and anxiety was forgotten, boy-fashion, in the joy of the present situation. Island or mainland, what mattered it, so long as they could now feel firm ground under their feet, and realize that they had managed to cheat the maw of the ravenous sea?

For a brief time the boys were content to lie there on the sand and recover their breath; but it was hardly to be expected that either Specs or the Hoofnagle boy could remain inactive long, with the pangs of hunger gripping their inwards, and food so near at hand.

"What's doing?" inquired Tom, presently, on discovering that Specs was moving around, and acting as if in search of something that continued to elude him.

"I'm trying to see if there happens to be any stuff around here that I could use to make a fire with, that's all," responded the other. "Thought it might make us all feel a heap

better if only we could dry off, and get a cup of hot coffee inside us."

"No objections on my part," declared Tom, promptly.

"Gount me in, undt dot'd no choke!" grunted the heavy-set Hop, still somewhat short of breath, it seemed, but exultant nevertheless, grateful over his late miraculous escape from a watery grave.

"We'll all turn to and hunt for stuff," suggested practical Tom, "but it strikes me we're apt to have better success further along, and away from the open beach. There are heaps of scrub palmetto growing around, and the dead leaves of that will nearly always make a fine flare. When we get some light we'll run across plenty of wood, I reckon."

Many hands made light work, and presently they had quite a little pile of dead scrub palmetto leaves, that were almost as large as those from full-grown trees. Specs thereupon felt for his match-safe, and immediately gave a whistle to indicate surprise, also disappointment.

"Just a single match left," he announced, gravely. "Of course we have a wheen of the same inside the baking-powder can, where let's

hope they've kept nice and dry. Only for that I'd have to get busy with my outfit for making fires by friction—I've been trying that out for some time, and never succeeded to boast about as yet; but I think I can get there by keeping everlastingly at it."

"Then be careful of that last match, Specs," cautioned Tom. "Have everything fixed before you strike it, and make sure of the flare."

"Aber, idt means a lot to all of us, remember yet, Specs," adjured anxious Hop.

## CHAPTER VI

### AMONG THE SAW PALMETTOES

BEING put on his guard after this fashion, the firemaker omitted no shred of caution when setting about building up the much needed blaze. First of all he made certain of having a bountiful supply of dry tinder, for the most part the inflammable dead leaves of the scrub palmetto.

Further than this he had shrewdly chosen a retired spot back of the sandy ridge marking the top of the beach, and shielded from the now dying breeze. It would be nothing short of a calamity, in his estimation, should an impertinent puff of salty air extinguish his sole match just as he ignited the same.

The others hovered anxiously about, almost holding their breath as the critical moment arrived for the supreme test. Deliberately, though with fingers that undoubtedly trembled, Specs drew the match along a bit of sandpaper he had taken from his inner pocket; there was a bright flash, and with one movement he

had applied the flame to the waiting little heap of crumpled dead leaves.

They did not fail the firemaker, and both Tom and Hop uttered fervent exclamations of satisfaction when the success of the operation was positively assured.

"Ach! sooch goot luck as never vas," observed the Hoofnagle Kid, allowing himself to breathe naturally once more. "I dell you, poys, mine heart she sthop beating like a piece of lead. I vould haf peen madder as some hornets of dot match she goes blink on us, undt you hear me talking."

"All's well that ends well," chirped the more contained Tom, though he must also have confessed to considerable anxiety, had he been cross-questioned by any one. "Let's hope the making of this fire is going to prove what Professor Gulick of Gulfport High would call a good augury."

It was an easy job to add further contributions to the blaze, since the light of the fire allowed them to see for considerable distance around. At Tom's solicitation Hop then commenced to collect fuel—first more dead scrub palmetto leaves, with their stalks; although he complained frequently of sticking his fin-

gers on the saw teeth of the latter; then a little later he found fragments of wood that must have been washed over the sand ridge during some hurricane of past years, and which, when dried out by the heat, promised to carry the fire along handsomely.

Already all of them showed signs of feeling a thousand per-cent more cheerful. There is nothing like a fire to raise drooping spirits, when boys are soaked to the skin, and as hungry as bears in the bargain—unless it is a steaming cup of fragrant coffee, flanked by an abundant supply of food.

Evidently the sagacious Specs had this in mind, for already was he busily employed in putting coffee in their battered boiler, which from its appearance must have done duty on many a previous expedition.

They had fetched one of the water cans ashore from the stranded *Bullbat*. Knowing that it would be impossible to find any real fresh water on Cat Island, where they planned to camp while Tom carried through certain mysterious experiments with his beloved radio equipment, they had made sure of having an abundant supply of the necessary liquid. This was carried in all sorts of vinegar jugs,

and rusty tin containers, such as boys might gather in their respective cellars.

It was after the coffee-pot was on the fire, and Specs opening one of the hampers of food, that Tom suddenly remembered something which hitherto must have slipped his mind, owing to all the confusion aboard the catboat after the squall struck them off Gulfport.

He plucked the passing Hop by the sleeve as the other was fetching in an armful of damp wood, to arrange the same close to the blaze, so it might partially dry out.

"I forgot to ask you about that package I was expecting to get by mail Hop—did it come O. K.?" he inquired, solicitously, just as though it might have contained diamonds, or something equally valuable in the estimation of a boy who was nursing a certain fad that possessed him bone and body.

"Py shinger! undt me, I had der same all knocked oudt of mine head too, don't you know, Tom, oldt scout!" chuckled Hop, as though it struck him in a ludicrous sense; but then it was always known the Hoofnagle boy had what he called a "keen sense of the ridiculous," and could burst into a loud laugh,

when others hardly thought it worth while to even smile.

His manner alarmed Tom, however, who maintained his grip on Hop's arm while he shot another question at him.

"Did it come all right?" he demanded, and when the other started to wag his big head in the affirmative, Tom added: "then I sure hope you haven't *gone and lost it?"*

Hop let his bundle of wood fall to the ground, so that he might get his right hand up, and scratch his abundant thatch of bristly hair, a favorite expedient of his when cornered, and desirious of sharpening his slow-moving intellect. Then he beamed happily on his interlocutor.

*"Aber nit,* Tom—me nodt dot kind to lose noddings. I haf der leetle package all right ven I comes me py der ship; undt after I didn't see anydings uf you, so that I feels dumb tired, undt makes ready for a cat-nap py der nice varm plankets, I dinks me to wrap der package in dot oldt red planket, undt sticks der same in dot pocket joost under der cabin roof!"

"Good for you, old top!" ejaculated the relieved Tom. "I must get hold of it right

away," with which he turned as if to hurry in the direction of the helpless stranded *Bullbat*.

"But why get wet to your middle again, wading out to the old tub?" asked Specs, looking up from his delighted business of putting a generous supply of sliced breakfast bacon in the big well smoked aluminum skillet. "Better wait till morning, and then you can see how to go about it. Besides, if the sea goes down, at low tide you may be able to get aboard dry-shod."

"If you only knew how much that package means to me," Tom told him, severely, "you wouldn't talk that way, Specs Whittleby"; with which he marched off, first snatching up his little electric flashlight, which he knew he could make good use of in seeking the object of his solicitude, not to speak of its value in assisting him to get aboard the boat.

Specs looked dubiously after his chum, and nodded his head, as he muttered to himself.

"Now isn't he the greatest mystery going—just loves to keep a fellow guessing to beat the band. Got some dandy scheme buzzing in his head, and ab-so-lutely refuses to take his best chum into his confidence, meanin' to spring a big surprise on me, I reckon, and get me

rattled. Oh! well, for all that there's only one Tom Turner, and he's my own pal!"

It was some little time before the absent one showed up again, and really Specs had begun to get a little worried when Tom's cheery whistle was heard just over the rise, from which barometer of his feelings it struck Specs he must have been entirely successful in his mission.

Yes, he was carrying the dingy old red camping blanket under his left arm, and using his flashlight with the other hand, so as to avoid stumbling over the partly exposed and twisted saw palmetto roots that littered the ground. But he did not show the slightest disposition to expose what the blanket concealed from view, nor was Specs the one to banter him about his secrecy.

"Huh!" the cook was scornfully saying to himself, as he took a peep at the coffee, to see if it had commenced bubbling, so he might dash a bit of cold water in to keep it from boiling over, "if he doesn't take the cake for loving to coddle a dark mystery, and keep everybody in a muddle till the time is ripe for exposing his hand. As for *me,* I would absolutely refuse to take a peep inside that blanket even if I

had a dozen chances—I'm not that kind of a snooper, if I know myself!"

Just then the coffee exhibited a frenzied desire to put out the blaze, so that Specs had to snatch up a pad to protect his fingers from being burned, and snatch the pot off the fire. The two chums, being old and experienced campers, never went off without carrying along certain iron rods ingeniously fashioned, which could be quickly made to serve as a resting place for several cooking utensils at a time, immediately above the blaze; they scorned to make any use of the old-time antiquated method of placing the coffeepot on a stone, or a log foundation, at constant risk of having it tilt over, and thus bring costly delay, possibly even black ruin, on all preparations for a glorious camp spread.

All of them were beginning to get dried off by now, save Tom, who of course had paid for his ardent desire to salvage his precious mail package by once more getting soaked up to his waist. Besides, all minor troubles were banished from their minds on sniffing the delightful odors of coffee, and frying bacon.

Specs soon called on them to settle down, tailor-fashion, by doubling up their legs; and

then receiving a helping from the frying-pan, as well as a cup of the brown nectar he had been brewing. Fortunately they chanced to have an extra aluminum cup along among their camp dunnage, as well as an additional platter; while Hop could borrow a knife with which to spread his bread. There was a can of evaporated cream, also a plentiful supply of sugar for the coffee—trust those wise chaps, Tom and Specs, for omitting nothing that might be calculated to add to their enjoyment while in camp.

All seemed moving along merrily as could be wished, and since boys are seldom apt to worry about the future, not a discordant cloud appeared on the horizon just then. If they could have lifted the curtain, and had even a glimpse of what the immediate future held for them, possibly they might not have been so light hearted at their first meal on the mysterious island—for somehow all of them had by now firmly decided they were *not* on the mainland, but had been washed up on some unknown key that lay many miles off the coast.

As the meal drew near its close, with everybody having all they wished in the way of food and drink, Tom kept watching the Hoofnagle

boy scratching his head, and looking distressed; and full of curiosity as to what might be passing through that slow-moving mind of his, went straight to the mark, as was his usual way, and asked him the cause of his sudden lapse from gaiety to a condition of perplexity. Hop gave him a troubled look, and lost no time in opening his heart; he was one of those confiding fellows, who, when in trouble, always seek some more able comrade upon whom to lean, and pour out their woes. And so he began to open his heart to his comrades.

## CHAPTER VII

### BY THE SMOULDERING CAMPFIRE

"IDT moost pe dot storm vat knock me galley-vest, so for der life of me I gannot remember vich vay der cat jump!" wailed Hop; and then assuming a really dreadful expression, indicative of disgust, and anger, he proceeded to knock his head with his fist, in a way that made Specs fear he would really do himself some injury, as he went on to add: "Ach! dose stupid brains, once again dey get me in a pickle, so try vich way I do, it is all mixed oop."

"Hold on there, Hop," interrupted Tom, meaning to bring the other to his senses, so he might tell a straight story. "Get a clutch on yourself and let us know what's bothering you—straight now, remember. And drop that broken Dutch dialect stuff, for we know you can talk plain United States when you're in school. Now hit it up, Hop."

The other made a grimace, worked his fat face as if doing his best to recover his scram-

bled wits, and then wonder of wonders, actually smiled as sweetly as any cherub ever known. That was Hop's method of "getting a hold on himself," just as some stutterers have found relief by waiting to swallow three separate times before committing themselves to speak.

"Well, it's all about a *letter,* fellows," he remarked, with a deep sigh that must have welled straight up from his overburdened heart.

"Oh! that's interesting I declare!" chirped the grinning Specs.

"What letter?" inquired the tactful Tom, not meaning that Hop, after being thus rudely shaken out of his strange hobby of playing the Dutch boy, should be allowed to drift back into his old habit again—at least not until he had finished his explanation.

"A mighty important letter that my dad gave me to drop in the post-office this afternoon," the other went on to explain.

"Well, didn't you do it?" Tom continued, with the severity of a learned Judge on the bench.

"Sometimes I seem to be dead certain I did: and then again I begin to feel a cold, qualmy grip on my heart, when I fear I forgot to do it,

being more deeply interested in getting that package for you, Tom. If I was on the spot right now you'd see me going licketty-split down to the home of Mr. Jasper, the postmaster, and asking him if he remembered mailing such a letter; but that's an impossibility now, with me castaway on a desert island, miles and miles away from Gulfport. It's rotten luck, I tell you, fellows, to have such a treacherous memory as I've got. And I reckon I'll sure stay awake all night worrying over this thing."

"But,—you *were* in the post office, or else you couldn't have gotten my package, you understand," pursued Tom.

"Oh! yes, that's true enough," blurted poor Hop. "I can distinctly remember being there, and my having that same packet is dead sure proof. I only wish I could be half as certain I dropped dad's letter in the slit, that's all."

He set to knocking his poor head again, as though by such a silly device he hoped to bestir his brains long enough to decide positively that he had not been derelict in his filial duty.

"Stop that, Hop," said Tom, severely; "it isn't going to clear your mind the least bit, and you may give yourself a headache in the

bargain. Now see here, have you searched your pockets since getting into this mess, to find out if you still have your father's important letter on your person?"

He knew the other had, even when asking, for he had seen Hop feeling eagerly all about his clothes, and shaking his head dolorously meanwhile.

"Gone through every pocket, and I'm sure I haven't got it with me, Tom."

"Do you remember where you put it, then, at the time your dad gave it in your keeping?" pressed Tom.

"In my inside coat-pocket; but I changed my coat before starting for the post office, you see," Hop made answer.

"Do you suspect you could have left it in the other coat, or on the bed in your room?" asked Tom, perhaps because he knew how prone any boy would be to blunder in this stupid fashion—it may be he himself had done a similar thing in times past, for Tom was only an ordinary lad, subject to most of the failings his happy-go-lucky kind are heir to.

"That's the funny part of it," announced Hop, grinning; "for I can distinctly remember, as plain as print, of stowing the letter safe-

ly away in this coat—the inside pocket too, after I put it on. Nothing hazy about that part of the silly thing, Tom."

"I'd call that encouraging, Hop," he was told, in the effort to relieve his evident distress, "for you could hardly lose a letter from that inside pocket while on the way to the boat landing, nor yet while you had your unfortunate nap aboard, while waiting for me to show up—don't you see, the chances are ten to one you did drop it in the post-office mail slit; but it happens to be one of those things we all do more or less mechanically, which explains why you can't be dead sure about it. But try and believe everything is all right; you've got enough to worry about without making straw scarecrows, that are only dummies after all."

"I'll try to do as you say, Tom," bleated poor Hop, "and after all I feel what you say must be the right answer to my puzzle. But dad said that letter was mighty important, and told me to take special pains to get it in the post office so it could go out in the four o'clock mail."

"All right, *it went,* I'm certain about that, so wipe the matter out of your mind, Hop. Have another cup of coffee to cheer yo up."

The Hoofnagle kid gave Tom a look.

"Don't care if I do, Tom," he said, passing his cup along; "and I'm meaning to do my level best to believe, with might and main, that letter went out in the four o'clock mail."

But as was proven later on, it was one thing to determine so bravely, and quite another to carry the will power into execution. Despite his promise Hop was bound to be kept awake, more or less, by his harrowing doubts and fears, until in some fashion he could learn the actual truth, and thus find a happy relief.

Although their appetites had been satisfied, and that horrible vacant feeling no longer bothered them, the boys soon found themselves becoming tremendously sleepy. It may have come from the distress of body and mind, under which they had so lately labored; but this drowsy feeling was at least accentuated by the heat of the campfire.

Tom finally suggested that they make use of the now dry blankets, and rig up some sort of bunks. Nothing could be done to pick up information concerning their surroundings until dawn came along, and meanwhile they would be showing wisdom to recuperate through a good sleep.

No one made the least objection to this plan, and so picking out a blanket apiece—Specs himself choosing the dingy old red one, long since discarded, so that their uninvited guest, Hop, might make use of his new gray one,—they proceeded to select certain inviting spots, where they could best find comfortable resting places.

Hop being much of a novice at camping, the others displayed special pains to coach him, in order that no one could say they took advantage of his ignorance; but when the jolly Hoofnagle kid was a general favorite among all the Gulfport fellows, and had never been known to have an enemy, an honorable record which neither Tom nor Specs could claim.

When Tom had fairly settled himself under cover, the fire was commencing to die down, although some of the driftwood had been thrown upon the red bed of ashes by Specs before he turned in.

Hop was still sitting up and arranging his bed, not being so clever about it as his comrades, for it takes experience to make any one an adept concerning all the little wrinkles of camping, and the stout boy was sadly lacking in such essential knowledge. When Tom saw

him shaking his head dolefully, he realized that, despite his resolution to look on the cheery side, poor Hop was in for a broken rest; times without number he would in imagination go all over his actions while in the post-office, and try to vividly picture himself actually dropping that letter in the slit; only to lamentably fail to conjure up some incident that would make it an absolute fact—as Tom would likely say, he could not "tune in worth a cent."

The last thing Tom found himself about, before dropping off, queer as it might seem, was connected with that strangely moving light mentioned by Specs as having been noticed by him somewhere out at sea, about the time they were being washed ashore. When Tom went down again to board the *Bullbat* he had even taken the trouble to stand with an arm about the tilted mast and cast a steady and keen look around a half circle, covering what he knew must be the open gulf. Nothing of any nature had come under his observation, however, and he hardly knew whether to believe it had all been imagination with his chum, or else the light came from some sponge fisherman, or trawler whose sea-worthy craft had

managed to live through the storm, and whose riding-light had caught Specs' roving eye.

Not a sound of any kind, such as would indicate that the island might be inhabited, had come to their attention all the time they sat by their fire, eating, and exchanging confidences. On which account Tom determined not to allow the matter to give him any concern.

If in the morning they were lucky enough to discover there was a means at hand, such as promised them a speedy return home, so much the better. Sponge fishermen, or those who used their nets at full tide to gather in the finny denizens of the Gulf—redsnapper, grouper, channel bass, pompano, or it might be extra large mullet, to be packed in ice-filled barrels, and shipped to the Northern markets—it mattered little, provided they could induce the men to carry them to the mainland, so they could take a train for home.

Perhaps far-seeing Tom may have had little misgivings with regard to the law-abiding character of certain sea-going men who were likely to make use of the gulf islands in these modern days of rum running; he had not been reading the papers for nothing, filled as they

were with thrilling stories concerning the adventures of Government officers, whose especial duty it was to keep a watch for illicit cargoes that were nightly being shipped into secluded American coast districts, from foreign island ports in the West Indies, or it might be some Mexican city on the gulf shore.

However, Tom was taking to himself some of the medicine he had prescribed for Hop in that he resolutely put these sinister thoughts out of his mind, determined not to meet trouble halfway; should they be destined to run foul of some of these lawless smugglers, it would be time enough then to worry.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MORE TROUBLE CROPS UP

AN HOUR or so later, while the fire still burned fairly well, Tom Turner stirred under his blanket, raised his head like an old mud-turtle looking around so as to discover whether there were any malicious boys in the neighborhood, and on finding that both Specs and Hop were undoubtedly sound asleep, what did Tom do but creep out from under his coverings, make for the place where all the stuff taken from the stranded boat had been piled, and fish some object from among the mass of junk.

It was the package that Hop had taken out of the post-office, and wrapped in the old red blanket before he allowed himself to lie down in the boat cabin so as to pick up a little of his "lost sleep."

Back to the fire went Tom, stepping carefully so as not to awaken his campmates. Sitting there he undid the paper coverings, bearing numerous cancelled stamps, and the bus-

iness address of some firm up North, dealing in all manner of radio supplies.

Long did the enraptured enthusiast sit there, handling over and over again the contents of the packet, as though figuring things out in that active brain of his, and doubtless even picturing his possible hour of triumph, when the success he coveted actually rewarded his earnest efforts. A smile of anticipation seemed stamped on his face, as if he would not let doubts and fears have dominion over him; yes, plainly Tom belonged to that army of aspiring young radio fans, always working, and dreaming of accomplishing wonderful things along the line of their dearest fad.

Finally he condescended to again encase the object in its heavy manila wrappers, fastening the same with a stout cord taken from a pocket always supplied liberally with odds and ends, such as any boy is apt to find a use for on the slightest provocation. Then replacing the treasure with the rest of the "duffle" Tom, again casting a suspicious glance at both his comrades, such as miser might employ after fondly handling his gold, he once more sought his blanket.

So morning found the trio, sleeping as calmly as the traditional babes in the wood. It was, singular to relate, Hop Hoofnagle who chanced to be the first to awaken. Tom heard him stirring, and looking over that way discovered the other sitting up, his mop of bristly hair standing on edge, while he dug the knuckles of both fists into his eyes, and then stared around him in a most bewildered fashion.

Apparently Hop could not understand where he was, for certainly his surroundings, so wild in themselves, and with the murmur of the sea gurgling up on the nearby beach, did not bear the slightest resemblance to his well known room in the Hoofnagle domicile.

"It's all right, Hop," chuckled the amused Turner boy; "real stuff, and no dream, let me tell you. There *was* a storm, and you did find yourself kidnapped by the old *Bullbat,* in the cabin of which you'd allowed yourself to go to sleep, while waiting for me to come along. Yes, and we were driven ashore on this island, being mighty lucky to make so safe a landing. And now it's about time we got Specs to show a leg, so he can start up the fire, and see about

giving us all some breakfast, Eh, how about that, Hop?"

Then Hop deigned to grin, and wag his head, for the subject of feeding always did have a tremendous hold upon his affections. He threw off the blanket, and gained his feet, running immediately over to the ashes of the fire which had served them so wonderfully on the preceding night.

"Py chimineddy! dose blazes dey iss died oudt; dese ashes, I dell you, are cold like a pad egg. Me, I dought de vood must keep going all der night, put now I haf me anudder guess goming, mebbe yet!"

"Oh! well, that doesn't matter at all, Hop," remarked Tom, complacently. "We happen to have a whole baking-powder can full of matches. Oh! by the way, Specs," as that worthy rolled out of the "nest" of crumpled red blanket, "do you happen to remember running across that reservoir of firesticks, while you were fumbling over our provender last night, before getting supper?"

Specs looked at him in a puzzled way, as though suddenly growing uneasy.

"Now, would you believe me, Tom, somehow I don't seem to remember running across that

same can at all," he spluttered, looking half scared; for it had been on his list to provide a bountiful supply of matches. "But say, that was no oversight of mine, I want you to know; for I sure did cram an empty baking-powder can with the things, in ma's own kitchen."

"I'm sure you did, Specs," Tom remarked, with a nod, "because I took a birdseye look through your assortment when you were hunting for a big sheet of heavy paper to wrap about the same—there were bacon, salt pork, flour, pepper, and salt, a jar of butter, bread, cake, and a whole raft of other things, among them the aforementioned can. Why, luckily, to make certain you were not running off with your Ma's baking-powder by mistake, I took off the cover, and peeked."

"Huh! and what then—was it full of matches, Tom?" anxiously.

"Just what it was," he was assured. "But as I didn't see you wrap the stuff up, why, it's always possible you got a little mixed, and —left our supply of matches lying on the table, hidden among scraps of paper."

"But I'm dead sure I didn't," protested Specs, earnestly. "I can remember as clear as anything finding a place for that can; yes,

and grunting a heap when on the way to the boat-landing, just because it kept poking me in the ribs almost every step I took."

"But get a move on, and see if you can find it, Specs," urged the other, bent on making certain, one way or another.

Specs was quickly engaged in tossing the little pile of "duffle" around at a lively rate, so in almost no time it looked as though something a little short of an earthquake had struck their rude camp.

"That's foolish, Specs, don't you understand?" remonstrated the more systematic Tom. "You might pass it by, hidden in something or other, and never suspect the fact. Here, let me lend you a hand; we'll change everything over to this side, and make sure such a bulky object doesn't slip through our fingers. Once that is done, and the question will be settled, yes or no!"

When they had really gone completely through the collected stuff, and without the baking-powder can materializing, it was Specs' turn to assume a puzzled expression.

Suddenly, as though an inspiration had seized him, he started away. From the fact that he headed toward the water it was evident

he meant to get on board the *Bullbat,* so as to learn whether through some accident the missing means for starting a cooking fire had been left there.

Ten minutes afterwards he again showed up, and the woebegone expression on his long thin face was more strongly defined than ever.

"That's certainly a mystery, I want to say, here and now," was the way he broke out, almost savagely. "I'll eat my hat if ever I left those matches behind; and you know, Tom, how I checked every item off on my list as I piled 'em up on the kitchen table, even to the extra jugs, after you'd said mebbe we didn't have quite enough to see us through."

He hurried over to make another thorough search of the disturbed duffle, although Tom smiled, and shook his head skeptically as he went on to observe:

"No use wasting time there, son; I ran it all over while you were away, and never a sign of what you're looking for. What did become of that can is a dark and troublesome secret, and may stand as such all the time we're left high and dry on this wonderful desert island."

Specs refused to be convinced until he had once more gone systematically through the accumulated stuff; then scratching his head and with an apology of a grin on his speckled face, he approached the others, saying whimsically, "Well, there's only one thing that can be done. They say it's necessity that's the mother of invention. Luckily enough I thought to fetch along my outfit for making fire *without* matches."

Tom looked dubious on hearing this.

"But—you've been trying for weeks to get some results with that little twirling bow thing, and the spinning stick in a groove, without once putting it through. Pity our poor stomachs if we have to delay having breakfast till you've accomplished the next to impossible."

"You wait and see," urged Specs, who was nothing if not determined; once he put his hand to the plough he declined to turn back. "Other fellows have made a success of the stunt, why shouldn't Specs Whittleby, tell me? Besides, it's a genuine necessity on this occasion, and perhaps I've just been needing something like this to spur me on. I'm bent on doing my level best anyway, Tom, say what you will."

Tom shrugged his shoulders, as though he found scant encouragement in this perversity on the part of his chum.

"Have it your own way then, Specs, and we both wish you a heap of success; but I'm telling you, here and now, that after ten minutes have passed, if you don't produce first smoke, and then a tiny fire, I'm bound to try something else."

"Meaning what?" asked Specs, curiously, as he started to undo a package that contained a number of things going with the purchased fire-making outfit—a little bow with a stout loose cord for wrapping around the stick that had a pointed end to fit a hole made in a block of wood, which in turn would contain some highly inflammable waste.

"Never mind," replied Tom.

"Perhaps now," insisted the other, as he worked feverishly arranging the accessories of his equipment, more carefully than, it might be, he had ever done in all his previous unsuccessful experiments, "you might have a match or two hidden on your person, which would be a bit unfair to me?"

"Huh! I only wish I was that lucky," Tom chuckled; "for once we get a blaze going again,

it would be up to us to make sure of its staying in, day and night, all the time we're marooned on this bally island. But I'm certain there isn't a single match in the bunch; and I think I can speak for Hop here as well as for myself."

"Nodding doing, poys, pelieve me!" affirmed the individual mentioned, shaking his head vigorously in the negative, and throwing up both hands in token of abject surrender.

Both of them stood and watched with interest while Specs arranged every detail carefully, so that he might make no silly slip. Tom even assisted by loosening more waste, so that should the precious spark be finally obtained through the violent and continued twirling of that pointed stick, it might not escape them, and all the work prove in vain.

## CHAPTER IX

### FIRE WITHOUT MATCHES

"DO IT, Specs! Never be weary of well doing!" urged Tom, after some little time had elapsed, with the ambitious fire-maker whirling his stick most strenuously, by moving his miniature bow to and fro as rapidly as possible, while the perspiration began to stand out in beads on his forehead.

"I'm bound—to keep stringing this—old bow till—the cows come home—either I'll get a blaze—or kick over in a dead faint!" spluttered the determined Specs.

More minutes passed, and Tom made a move, drawing some object out of his pocket, which proved to be such a convex lens as was used in old-fashioned bullseye police dark-lanterns. This was noted by the anxious Specs out of a corner of his eye, though he did not relax his violent sawing an iota.

"There's smoke at last!" he gasped, as if eager to keep the other from beating him in the desired goal.

"I see it," Tom coolly told him;" but that's an old story with you, my boy. A dozen times you've brought *smoke,* but never reached the last stage. So I'm meaning to get busy, and if only there's enough heat in the sun at this early hour of the day, I'll have a fire burning before you can count three hundred."

"Ugh!" grunted Specs, increasing his efforts, in desperation, if such a thing were really possible.

As for honest Hop, he crouched there, with bent knees, his eyes seeming to stick out of his head, so entranced had he become in watching the rivalry of the pair of fire-worshippers.

The smoke was now really assuming respectable proportions, coming up from the hole in the block of wood, where that little smudge of tinder in the shape of oiled waste lay snugly hidden. But so, too was Tom succeeding in coaxing considerable heat upon one tiny spot, thanks to the force of the late summer sun; so that a tiny wisp of smoke was noticeable, much to the delight of the hovering Hoofnagle kid, whose hands were now tightly clenched, such was his overpowering excitement.

"Ha! at last!" gasped Specs, as he dropped his little bow, and leaning over commenced to

blow softly in order to "coddle" his spark, so that it might increase its dimensions, and do business.

Half a minute later he picked up the little bunch of smoking waste, and started to swing it back and forth in the most approved manner of all experienced Boy Scouts, who have mastered the secrets of making fire in this interesting way.

"Watch *me!*" shrilled Specs, as he bent over and carefully placed his now burning scrap of waste under a large supply, which immediately took fire, and on which he lost no time in laying a handful of broken dead palmetto leaves.

"Watch *me!*" echoed Tom, triumphantly, as he copied everything that Specs had just done, vastly to the delight of Hop.

"Two fires going—gan you peat dot?" gurgled the witness of this double triumph. "Vat do ve care off ve haf no matches—ach! sooch smarties, dey gan pull fire out of der air! now meppe ve get us somedings to eat quick!"

"But," gasped Specs, with one of his wide grins, "mine started first, and I reckon you'll admit I won the race, Tom?"

"That's correct, Specs, and you deserve a whole lot of credit for sticking to your job. Still, I used less than a third of the time it took you; so it strikes me, given some sunshine, the burning glass does its work a lot easier than your fine little bow, and all that stuff you lug around with you."

But Specs glowed with pride, since at last he had succeeded in accomplishing a task that for weeks had defied his utmost efforts.

"But after now, warned Tom," this has got to be a sacred blaze with us. We must never let it die out, even if somebody has to get up half a dozen times in the night to put fresh wood on."

Specs busied himself in preparing breakfast. In so doing he could not help but remark on the limited amount of provisions they had on hand, which was a subject full of interest to all of the marooned boys.

Hop in particular set to work endeavoring to extract some cheer from what seemed to be a sore matter; he realized that his unexpected addition to the camping party was bound to make a big hole in the meagre stock; and this consciousness spurred him on to suggest nu-

merous possibilities connected with hoped-for additions to their larder.

"Idt might pe ve could get us somedings each day like nice sea trout—den how apout dem red-snapper fish dot iss for sale at Gulfport? I myselluf am some punkins ven idt comes to fishing; undt meppe I aint tickled to sit me down before a pig king fish browned like my mudder does idt. Oh! I dinks me ve ain't going to starve us yet a vile, poys."

"Oh! there are lots of things three smart chaps like us can do, when we're pushed to it for grub," asserted Specs, boastfully. "I reckon now there might be some birds nesting on this island, and if so what's to hinder our gathering a supply of real fresh-laid eggs once in a while. A fowl might go pretty well for a change, too. Course we couldn't expect to knock over a goat, like old Robinson Crusoe used to do, because there isn't any. But I'm dead sure we'll be apt to find 'coon oysters on some bar; and while they're small, I've eaten 'em many a time. Clams too, might be found buried in the sand."

Even Tom found it worth while to add to the numerous suggestions, since this subject

of edible supplies was one in which each fellow had a deep interest.

"I chanced to notice some little tracks on the sand of the beach when I was down there a bit back, to see if my bully old boat hung out, and I'm almost certain they were made by a raccoon. You see there are mangroves growing along one side of the island, just above high-water mark, where some little lagoons hold brackish water; and 'coons just love to make their homes among such a raft of roots and branches."

"But Tom," broke in Specs, "however could 'coons get out to an island that must be all of ten miles and more from the coast?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders, boylike.

"Ask me something easy, Specs, and I'll answer you. How should I know the secrets of Nature. It might be a pair of 'coons were washed ashore on a floating tree; then again maybe they came on some fisherman's vessel, and abandoned it while the gang was working here. All I can say is the tracks were made by a 'coon, or else I don't know 'em when I see such."

"Put, do you mean to dell me ve might haf to gome down to eating 'coon meat or starve

us to death?" asked Hop, in a trembling voice, as though the very thought of such a thing appalled him.

"Oh! you'd find it a fairly decent dish," Tom coolly assured the skeptical Hop. "All the darkies just love baked 'coon, though of course it doesn't compare with 'possum and yams. After breakfast we ought to take another look around for that missing can of matches. It sort of galls me to have anything lost through —well, sheer carelessness!" with a grin in the direction of Specs, which caused that worthy to shake his head, as if to imply he absolutely declined to admit that the responsibility was his.

"You pet me my life I feel dot vay mine-selluf!" Hop was heard to mutter; from which remark it seemed evident he was unable to get the mystery of the letter delivery at the post-office out of his disturbed mind.

The breakfast was everything that could be desired, only perhaps lacking a bit in quantity; Specs, with an eye to curbing the ferocious appetites boys usually possess, on account of the hole already made in their provender, limited the rations a bit, "skimped," as he shamelessly admitted, when Tom found there was no

additional help of crisp fried bacon to be had; and that the second slice of bread, which he meant to toast at the red embers of the fire, was woefully thin.

"I want to go easy on our stock of breakfast bacon," apologized the cook, noting the hard and suspicious looks that were being cast in his direction. "If we do have to come down to eating fish, and 'coons, and such stuff, we'll be glad to have a few slices, either of that or else plain bacon, to sort of give the meat an edge."

When he spoke of "bacon" he was referring to what in the North is known as salt pork. Southern people always refer to the cured article as "breakfast bacon," to distinguish it from the salted kind.

Still, while not exactly filled to repletion, all of them felt fairly satisfied when every scrap of food, and every drop of coffee had disappeared.

"Well," Specs gave it as his opinion, as he leaned back, and smiled benignly at his two fellow wrecked mariners, "things might be a whole lot worse with us, let me tell you, boys. So long as we can manage to scrape out a living on this desert island, by catching fish; trapping rabbits; or if we have to come to it,

fat 'coons; gathering turtle eggs on the beach, if they lay any so late in the year; or feasting on the eggs of sea birds; we can have jolly evenings anyhow, with Tom's radio. It'll be fun to sit here by a fire, owners of all we survey, and listen in to WEAF in New York City, or maybe WSB down at Atlanta, just for all the world like we might be sitting there in your den at home, Tom; yes, and even tuning in on Havana, if we chose."

Tom chuckled, and nodded his head sagely. From the twinkle in his eyes Specs felt certain his best pal had something "up his sleeve," which he intended to spring upon them; all the signs were there that he knew of old; he had not been chumming with Tom Turner these five years for nothing.

The search for the lost match reservoir proved as before, unavailing; though for that matter but scant time was given to the effort. Now that a fire was burning, and they expected to keep it going, the loss of the baking-powder can did not loom up so much in the nature of a dire calamity.

"Oh! well," commented Tom, finally, "We'll have to give it up as a bad job. As the fox said, when he couldn't jump high enough to

reach the grapes, 'they're sour, anyway;' and we really don't need those matches any longer. Now let's carry out the Crusoe spirit further. Since we've lugged everything ashore that was in the wrecked *Bullbat,* our next job ought to be to make some kind of shelter, to keep the stuff, and our own skins dry, in case we have another heavy rain, which you remember is often a regular daily occurrence down here along the Florida coast, at this time of year."

"Sounds good to me, Tom," agreed Specs, readily enough. "Another proper thing for us to be about would lie in the line of exploring our island, and finding out whether we happen to be alone; or have undesirable neighbors."

## CHAPTER X

### MAROONED

ALL of them started to work with a will, with the object of building some sort of rude shack, under which their precious belongings might find shelter from the elements, should there come another storm out of the southwest, where most of the summer rains peculiar to Florida, originate.

Scattering in several directions the hustling boys dragged to the site settled upon as their camp, all manner of material that might be used to fashion a shack. Tom had done something along these lines on previous occasions, when in the woods on a hunt, and so the others were well satisfied to nominate him the architect, and chief builder; while they kept up the task of providing the wherewithal in the way of any sort of material such as gave promise of being acceptable.

It was soon found that a regular bonanza could be tapped along the shore line just back of the high sand dune. This consisted in the

main of miscellaneous wreckage evidently cast up by the waves during storms long past, such flotsam being fragments of cabins, also logs and weighty planks, possibly from a deck load that had been floated off by some mounting billow.

Tom realized that many of these relics might tell some thrilling stories if only they had tongues; he could easily picture in his mind the howling of the dreadful hurricane, in the midst of which the doom of gallant barques had been sounded. Undoubtedly too, tragedies of the sea had accompanied the breaking up of different trading vessels of the Gulf, the remains of which he was now so unconcernedly weaving into a rough sort of shelter.

But as a rule boys are not romantically inclined; the main thing with the trio was to effect their end, and shield their possessions from the inclement weather that might be expected, sooner or later. So Tom handled each fragment of schooner, or fishing smack, as though it did not have any connection with human happiness or misery.

And really he did manage to build a fairly decent shelter, all things considered. Across the top he laid a number of long planks es-

pecially reserved for this particular purpose, and arranged with noticeable "dip," so as to shed the water when it rained.

Now he was ready to construct his roof, which was to be formed in the shape of a "thatch," fresh saw-palmetto leaves forming its principal ingredient. When several thicknesses had been laid, each series overlapping the one just below, Tom held them down with another lot of heavy timbers.

It was the consensus of opinion, after the shack was pronounced completed by the proud builder, that a creditable job had been done. So after standing around for some little time admiring its proportions; and crawling inside to discover whether there were any "leaks" where water might work through, the word was given to move their "truck" to the new quarters.

When everything was stowed away, the morning was half gone, so quickly had time slipped past.

"Shall we start out now to take a look around, and learn the worst, Tom asked his companions, "or wait until after noon, when we've had a pick-up lunch?"

"For my part," Specs told him, "I'm all set on starting out right away, so we'll know what we're up against. If it happens there are people on this island, no matter whether fishermen, or spongers, and we can get a chance to sail across to the mainland, why, our troubles would seem to be fairly over. On the other hand, if its a *real* desert island, then we must begin to get busy finding sources for laying in food; yes, and finding whether there is any fresh water at all to be had—that's bothering me as much as anything, you must know, fellows. We've got to keep on drinking, and the supply on hand isn't going to last very long—then what, since we can't use sea-water?"

"Don't cross a bridge till you get to it, Specs," Tom warned him. "Time enough to worry about that sort of thing when we know the worst. Lots of things can happen, and all sorts of changes come about. It'll be queer if three chaps, as resourceful as we are, can't manage to keep alive, and have our regular meals each day."

Hop, too, seemed desirous of settling the question without unnecessary delay, so accordingly they started forth. Each boy had maneged to find some sort of staff, or club, as

suited his fancy, and which might come in handy should danger confront them. They had no weapons to fall back upon, but it was just like the cautious Specs to stick the butcher knife he used in his culinary operations in his belt, under the impression that in an emergency it was apt to come in handy.

They already knew that some little distance back of the beach where the *Bullbat* had been washed ashore, there was something like a good-sized hill. Remembering how Crusoe had found it expedient to maintain an observation post on an elevation, and there arrange his signal of distress, in the hope that it might be noticed aboard some passing vessel, the three boys on consulting had agreed that they might sensibly adopt a similar plan of campaign.

At any rate, once they arrived at the top of the hill it was likely the mystery of their surroundings might be solved, since they would be able to learn whether they had been marooned on an island, or were actually on the Florida mainland.

As they wandered on they observed numerous things. Tom in particular proved himself to be a good scout, for nothing seemed to

escape his eagle eye; and from time to time he drew the attention of his mates to a variety of interesting facts.

Specs proved a good listener, and quick to understand how they might be able to wring results worth while by turning their attention to following up the ideas suggested by Tom. Hop was not so deeply concerned; indeed, he seemed to be lost in ruminations that could hardly have been of a pleasant character, to judge from the profound sighs that from time to time gurgled forth, and the frequent dolorous shakes of his head.

Although both the others could easily guess what ailed the Hoofnagle boy, and that his thoughts must be of the calamity he felt was hovering over the family home in dear old Gulfport, in case that letter failed of prompt delivery, still, both Tom and Specs considerately declined to let it appear that they noticed his gloomy state of mind, continuing to talk by themselves.

Occasionally they halted to bend over, and examine small imprints of animals. Once Tom said a roving 'coon had left the tracks; and another time he scratched his head, to vow that unless he was "away off his reckoning" a gen-

uine 'possum had been skirmishing around in search of food, which declaration added vastly to the mysteries by which they seemed to be surrounded.

But the greatest surprise of all came a little later, when they were well up the hill. Tom uttered an ejaculation, and stopping short in his tracks pointed excitedly downward.

"Ginger! what would you call that animal now?" demanded Specs Whittleby, his eyes opening wide as he stared. "Some size to those footprints, let me tell you. I never saw the trail of a wolf, and I don't believe such an animal was ever seen in Florida, or Alabama; but—Tom, a bobcat wouldn't make tracks like that, would it?"

"Not on your life, Specs; it belongs to the cat tribe, while the wolf, fox, coyote, and such beasts, are of the dog family. This was plain dog!"

Hop breathed easier on hearing this comforting remark; he had commenced casting nervous glances right and left, as though almost expecting some ferocious four-footed beast to spring from a covert and attack them.

"Just a dog, eh?" said Specs, bending closer to observe the imprints better. "Yes, I reckon

now partner you're hitting the nail on the head when you say that. I call it a promising sign —if a dog, then there must have been an owner ashore here. Next thing you know we'll be running across human footprints in the sand, like Crusoe did at the time he found his man Friday."

"At the same time these tracks were made before the last rain," warned Tom, "and both dog and man have left some days back. We'll not build too many air-castles, boys, only to have them crumble to bits. But the view of the gulf is fine up here. And away off yonder you can just see something that looks like a low bank of dim clouds. In my opinion that's the Florida coast—you know it's all low along between Pensacola and Cedar Keys, with shallow bays and sounds, and keys shutting off the gulf."

No one ventured to dispute what Tom said, but all looked eagerly away to the north, where that shore line was vaguely visible. Doubtless there was a wistful gripping of each boyish heart, upon realizing how possibly some fifty miles, more or less, to the westward, on that main shore, there nestled the little town in which loved ones dwelt—homes just then

doubtless beset with carking cares and anxieties concerning the fate of certain adventurous lads, whose disappearance on the eve of the storm had been followed by a sleepless night.

But although they may have winked away the tears that threatened to dim their eyesight; and swallowed certain lumps that seemed to almost choke them, not one of the plucky trio gave vent to a syllable such as might betray their overpowering emotion—pride came to the rescue, and they hastened to resume their lively chatter, as though they had not a care in the wide world.

Presently they arrived at the crown of the low hill. Here they were able to see all around, and this allowed them to ascertain that they were of a truth on an island, for in every quarter lay the dimpling waters of the Mexican Gulf, with a fresh morning breeze causing the little waves to chase along in endless numbers, splashing merrily up against the shore, or breaking on some hidden reef a little distance out.

Although they stood there for some time, eagerly searching for signs to tell of the existence of others besides themselves on the island, nothing hopeful greeted them. They could

note where it looked as if a little inlet, perhaps the mouth of a creek, fed by a spring located on the side of the hill, ran some distance into the land. Tom observed that such an inlet would make a most desirable landing-place for any boatload of men wishing to make use of the place as a camping spot.

"We'll head that way, fellows," he mentioned, when they were about ready to continue their exploration; "for if there's any chance to find people living on this island, that's the locality. I've got a sneaking idea this may be Maximo Island, which was named after some black-bearded buccaneer or pirate of the old days. Stories are told of him burying all sorts of treasure somewhere on this island; and years ago all sorts of parties were organized with the idea of digging up the ill-gotten gold doubloon."

"Gee whiz! but that's mighty interesting, and thrilling too!" exclaimed Specs, looking around with fresh zeal, as though what Tom had said inspired him anew. "Just think what jolly doings must have been going on here years and years ago, long before Washington was even born, and while New Orleans was only a French trading post."

Hop only glanced listlessly around down the hill and along the shore line, as though nothing mattered much beside his grief and inward troubles. All he could see in his mind were letters gone astray, and impending calamities, that might even be followed by an eviction of his folks from their dearly loved home. My! but it is tough, having such a load of carking care resting on his sturdy if young shoulders; poor Hop feared he would never again be the light-hearted lad of old.

They started down the side of the hill. Tom was heading in almost a direct line for the little inlet which he had marked in his mind as the most desirable place for any boat to land, the owners of which wished to make use of the island for some purpose or other.

When halfway down the descent he uttered a satisfied cry.

"You see I was right, Specs," he observed, loftily, "when I told you not to bother yourself about how we would get a supply of fresh drinking water. Here Nature has looked out for all that, just as if by a miracle."

"What's this I see?" gasped the astonished Specs; "a *real* spring, and pouring out of the side of the hill? It's simply impossible, and I

must be dreaming. However could water get up here, Tom, when there's no snow on a mountain-top to melt?"

"Well, it's a subject that has caused endless talk among scientific men for years and years —where does all that wonderful clear sparkling water come from that bursts out of the low ground in heaps of places down on the peninsula of Florida? I reckon it's been decided it comes all the way from North Carolina mountains, following some seam in the rocky strata, and reaching the surface hundreds of miles away. Why, one of those same outlets, Silver Springs, at the source of the Ocklawaha River gushes out so furiously that it's been the greatest wonder going for a long time."

"Then you reckon this spring on the hillside might have its source up in the Carolina region, do you?" asked Specs.

"I don't question the fact," Tom assured him. "But no matter, here's all the fresh water we can use, and then some. Let's try it out, fellows; I'm as dry as a bone."

Presently all three of them were stretched on their stomachs, and quaffing great draughts of the coldest and finest spring water they had ever sampled. Tom looking up found both

his mates nodding their heads, as though greatly delighted.

"Splendid!" Specs announced.

"Py shinks! idt vas *some* vater, pelieve me yet!" was the fervent verdict of Hop Hoofnagle, as he again buried his chin in the pool surrounding the bubbling spring.

"The fact of this wonderful spring being here," Tom presently remarked, "gives me the idea boats frequently stop off, and lay in a supply of fresh water. If that's the case we needn't worry about having to stay marooned any great length of time; even if some other dodge I'm running over in my mind happens to fizzle."

"Er, as what, Tom?" purred Specs, invitingly; but the other chuckled, and winking one eye only went on to say in reply:

"Don't you wish you knew, brother? But cheer up, everything is going to be made plain as print before long. Perhaps by the time another night passes you will be given points, and understand."

They had to almost drag Hop away from that lovely spring; he declared he felt much like camping there on that spot for hours,

trying to keep the pool from running over its little circular banks.

As they approached the small lagoon, where the sea water joined with that of the wonderful hillside spring, Tom kept his eyes on the alert, under the impression that if any discoveries were "on the carpet" they would be most apt to come across in this vicinity.

In a number of places they found evident signs of former human occupancy—charred fragments of wood told where fires had burned, at which doubtless brawny fishermen had sat, eating their supper, after a strenuous day at the nets; gathering sponges; or some other task that employed their time and attention. So, too, could be seen a quantity of rusty tin cans, once containing corn beef, tomatoes, or something else going to help out a meal. And mixed with these evidences of good times enjoyed by the campers were not a few bottles, Tom noticed, with a knowing nod.

Still, so far as indications went there was not the slightest sign of a living human being around; since they had failed to detect a wisp of smoke in any quarter, while on the hilltop eyrie, it looked as though they might be the only inhabitants of Maximo Island—if indeed

the place of their landing turned out to be that notorious refuge of the old-time buccaneer, whose name had been a terror in the days of the Spanish Main.

Filled with curiosity the boys began to "nose around," as Specs called it, seeking anything that might be termed a sign of human occupancy. Possibly Specs even had a lingering if faint hope that Fortune would smile upon them, taking them by the hand, as it were, and leading them to some spot where, on digging they would unearth a part of the immense hoard the pirate was said to have buried on his pet island, toll taken from the galleons bound for Spain from the new El Dorado of Central America and Mexico.

Thus it came about that even clumsy Hop Hoofnagle, without any intention of proving himself clever as an investigator, actually stumbled upon the Great Discovery. He called excitedly to his mates, who on hastening to his side found him with one leg thrust through a gap in what seemed to be a rude roof over a cleft in the hillside, cleverly camouflaged so as to avoid discovery.

"Ach! poys, dis time idt vas leetle Hop-o-my-Thumb as dud the pizness, *aber* I own up

she vas an accident like. I joost sticks mine foot through der oldt thing, undt she makes me some droubles rightaway quick. Hellup me oudt, blease, fellows; I am stuck in der hole like a trap, it iss."

Tom laughed.

"All the same the honor goes to you, Hop, for finding out what we wanted to know. This is some trick, I can plainly see. Here, Specs, lay hold on the other side, and give a yank; so, out he comes, 'right-side up with care.'"

Hop immediately pulled up the left leg of his trousers, to examine the condition of his "pin," and displayed a number of scratches, which proved to be the price he had paid for being a successful investigator.

"Now that's settled," ventured Tom, cheerily, "let's have a look-in at what lies so cleverly hidden under this roof. I might have passed within six feet of the same, and hardly suspected its existence."

"Oh! say, do you think old Max himself could have built this snug hiding-place ever so long ago?" asked Specs, his eyes glittering with cupdity, and an interest born of his love for tales of those olden days along the Florida coast, when danger rode on the high seas, and

vessels were wont to mysteriously disappear, with not a single trace to tell the ghastly story.

Tom rubbed his nose as though the conceit quite amused him.

"I'm sorry to strangle that nice little dream of yours, Specs," he went on to say; "but the evidence points to this secret *cache* having been only recently constructed. Still, I imagine it may hold a treasure, just the same, and worth a nice round sum in Uncle Sam's golden eagles. Come, let's take a turn around and see if we can find the opening, for there must be one I reckon."

Specs did not get the drift of the meaning, to judge from the perplexed look on his freckled face, and the way his lips were puckered up, just as always happened when he found himself puzzled, and at a loss.

Carefully they made their way around the cleft in the hillside, which it seemed might be only a freak of nature, which human ingenuity had harnessed for some particular service, the nature of which was as yet unknown to them.

Hop kept his "spear" half raised, as though more than half anticipated having to make speedy use of same, should some animal—a

wild boar it might be—suddenly rush out at them. But nothing of that sort came to pass, and shortly they found themselves on the lower side of the strange hidden cache.

Tom, while keeping a stringent lookout for anything that might move and threaten to do them violence, was at the same time evidently taking note of some scent in the air, for he certainly kept up a continual "sniffing" as he moved about. On his part, noting this peculiar conduct of his best chum, Specs could imagine they were playing a game of hide-and-seek, so that he was almost tempted to cry out: "Getting warmer, old top—colder—now you're almost *burning*, I tell you!"

And just at that very instant Tom, brushing aside a clever hanging screen in the shape of a thick bunch of vines, disclosed a sight that caused them all to stand stock-still, and stare as though they could hardly believe their own eyesight.

The bright sun dispelled any shadows that may have been lingering under the canopy of leaves and vines, and showed them pile on pile of boxes, all built along the same pattern, and marked with black letters!

"Oh! what does it all mean?" whimpered Specs, astonished at the sight, and not having been forewarned by the more knowing Tom, quite at a loss to understand.

"I told you the hole in the hill held a treasure, didn't I, Specs; well here it is in these heaps of cases, each holding two dozen bottles of hard liquor, that was distilled away over in Scotland, and is hidden here on our island, waiting a favorable chance to get smuggled into Uncle Sam's country, in spite of all the law officers and revenue men, as well as Coast Guards, the Government at Washington can hire to prevent its being done. Get that now, Specs?"

The other was fairly quivering with the violence of his feelings.

"I see what you mean, Tom—it's the rum-runners who are making a rendezvous of the old-time pirate island. Whatever will happen to us if they find we're on to their secret, tell me?"

## CHAPTER XI

### TREASURE ISLAND

"THAT'S a burning question we will have to consider later, Specs," the Turner boy calmly observed, showing that he himself must be more or less troubled by the complex nature of the situation.

"Mine gootness," gasped the eagerly listening Hop, in apparent dismay. "Idt vould not pe sooch a surbrises off such desperate scamps dey vant to hold us here on der island, mit der ghosts off pirates to be our campmates nights; put I hopes, Tom, you do nodt imagines dey vould vant to choke us like ve vas a litter off stray kitten cats?"

"Oh! come off that subject, Hop," protested Specs, with a shiver. "This is the twentieth century, recollect; we're not living back in the old times of Captain Kidd, and Blackbeard, with their gangs of cutthroats. These smugglers are a different bunch of men, you understand—chaps who just think it an easy chance to make big money by sneaking this stuff into

a country that's got a law against its being manufactured or imported."

"That's possibly correct, Specs," Tom broke in, to say soberly; "but we don't want to figure too much on the gentleness of these same bold law-breakers. If they found us here, they'd feel pretty certain we had discovered enough to give their secret hiding-place of Scotch away to the authorities, and on that account you can see how it's more than likely they'd plan to keep us prisoners here."

"On Maximo Island, you mean?" demanded Specs, aghast.

"Just that," he was assured.

"Forever undt forever, Tom?" weakly asked Hop.

"Well, just as long as they meant to play their game of hide-and-go-seek here with their horrible stuff."

"Undt dot's no choke." wailed the Hoofnagle kid, with a sad shake of his head. "Me, I vant to go py der home vonst; I dinks it vould kill me, dinking off dot letter all der time."

"Cheer up, both of you," urged Tom, trying himself to avoid looking in any way downcast.

"While there's life there's hope, you know the doctors all say. We'll do everything possible to keep from being found out; and even if the worst *should* come, perhaps it might be possible for us to play a trick on the bootlegger crowd that would leave them holding the bag."

Specs must have sensed something of the old Tom Turner luck and pluck, which had carried them to victory more than a few times in days long gone by; for he brightened up immediately, even to grinning slightly, and rubbing his long chin meditatively.

"But however could we get the old *Bullbat* afloat again, when she's settling more and more in the sand every minute?" he queried, as quick as a flash.

"Oh! you're swinging on the wrong track, Specs," chaffed the other. "No one said a word about the *Bullbat*—though I do hope we'll eventually be able to float her again. I've had some jolly times on the old junk, and I'd hate to think her bones were to be left on the sands of Maximo Island. Still, come to think of it, such an ending might be considered a lot romantic, remembering all the thrilling stories that have been handed down about this same stamping ground of the pirate chieftain."

Specs eyed his chum in a half-dazed manner, and then shook his head.

"You certainly are the greatest fellow I ever knew to cudgel up some clever trick, and then refuse your best pal a share in the same, up to the time you get good and ready. But I will say for you that when the explosion did come it was always well worth waiting for—the fireworks, I mean. What do we do now?"

"Try and fix up things here the best we can, and then go back to where we left our duffle under cover." Tom told him, "straight off the bat" as Specs himself would have said; it was customary with the Turner boy to think and act quickly; for his brain was built on just the opposite order from that of Hop for instance.

All of the boys were quite posted on what audacious schemes were being brought into play along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts by desperate men, most of them soldiers of fortune out of an engagement, (since there was no Central or South American country at war and eager to employ their services) in order to reap a harvest of dollars by running cargoes of wet goods into the land of the Stars and Stripes.

Up off the Jersey coast lay a string of vessels along Rum Row, as it was called, sometimes numbering more than half a score, and every one laden with contraband; which was being sold to the skippers of smaller craft, that relied on speed, and a superior knowledge of the numerous inlets and creeks along the shore, in order to evade revenue cutters, and Coast Guard boats.

In a smaller way the same thing was being done along the Florida coasts, even airplanes being employed to spin over from the Bahamas, and drop a valuable load at some prearranged point, under cover of night.

The men who were making use of this historic island as a rendezvous for their contraband goods only represented a minute fraction of the immense network of conspirators against which the Government was fighting, tooth and nail. Just what the nature of their game might be even Tom could only conjecture; but he had a pretty good idea they would all learn considerably more about the same before seeing the last of Maximo Island.

First of all Tom set to work endeavoring to remedy things where the clumsy Hop had thrust his foot through the fragile covering

that concealed the piled-up cases in the cleft. Being clever at this sort of thing Tom made a fairly decent job of his assignment. Unless a close scrutiny revealed the fracture he did not believe it would come to the attention of the smugglers.

Meantime Specs was engaged in trying to rub out certain footprints they had made; which, being smaller than those of the men, and looking much fresher, having been made since the rain, were apt to excite their curiosity, and lead to suspicions being aroused.

On the whole it was believed a fairly good job had been effected; and so they went away from the spot with a feeling of confidence. Hop could not get it through his head that the owners of all that expensive contraband would go off after another supply, and not leave a sentry to keep watch over the *cache*. Consequently he often turned his head quickly, as they walked away from the little lagoon, as though expecting, yet dreading, to discover a head thrust out from some bushes, or above a clump of the ever-present saw-palmetto scrub.

Apparently Hop was not built along the optimist order, for he always seemed to be

anticipating the worst. He did not happen to know, and understand Tom Turner as well as Specs; for somehow he failed to acquire any comfort whatever from the happy-go-lucky assurance with which that individual blithely told them it "would be all right."

They arrived at their secluded camp without meeting any further shock, Tom appeared unusually grave, as though wrestling with certain puzzling matters of no trifling character. He soon afterwards sent Hop to the hilltop, with orders to keep a bright lookout on every side, and report any sign of a sail in sight.

There was no further talk concerning the plan of hoisting a signal of distress, after the manner of their patron saint, old Robinson Crusoe—such a thing would only hasten discovery by the lawless gang that was using Maximo Island as a repository for their illegal goods. In fact, under the new arrangement all signs connected with their presence on the island were to be studiously avoided.

Of course the stranded *Bullbat* would be apt to tell some kind of story, if noticed by the smugglers. Tom, understanding how the men usually visited their *cache* under cover of night, kept hoping this discovery might be long

delayed. Perhaps he even secretly hoped that if another stiff gale swept along the Florida coast it might work the old craft loose, and carry it off.

When noon came they had a cold "snack," for cautious Specs proved himself to be a good manager, and believed in conserving the scant supply of coffee that remained. It must be treated as real nectar, every amber drop of which was worth a hundred times its weight in gold.

No one uttered the slightest word of complaint, for they realized that it was not stinginess that actuated the guardian of the food-chest, but an absolute necessity for "going slow with the grub."

It proved to be an unusually long afternoon in the estimation of Specs and Hop Hoofnagle. They took catnaps from time to time; frequently walked up the hill for a fresh observation; and fetched back abundant supplies of cold water from the spring. At the same time Tom assented himself for several hours, possibly roving about, and "investigating"—he was a great hand at this sort of thing, leaving no stone unturned in the endeavor to make new and possibly important discoveries.

It was rather late in the afternoon when he stalked quietly into camp. Hop was again up at his post on the hilltop, while Specs lay on his stomach, reading a book which he must have surreptitiously fetched along in his duffle, though such a thing was unheard of in all their previous camping undertakings.

"What's that you've got there, Specs?" asked curious Tom; at which the other chuckled, and looked at bit guilty.

"Oh! I knew it was against all our rules to carry a book with us when we went camping," admitted the culprit; "but this time I just couldn't keep from doing it. You see, Dad gave me a new copy of Tom Sawyer on my birthday. Course I'd read him long ago; but I started in the second night before we left home, and was so excited about his doings I just felt tempted to carry the book along, thinking to pass a rainy day with it."

The Turner boy himself laughed as joyous recollections crowded into his brain.

"Well, history likes to repeat, they say, Specs; and I declare if there isn't something alike in the adventures of Tom Sawyer with his trusting pal Huckleberry Finn, and what's happened to us. They had a wonderful thrill-

ing time down in that cave, where they found the great treasure; and here we are castaways on an island that once harbored the pirate chief, Maximo; with rum-runners having a *cache* full of high-priced stuff they mean to smuggle into Uncle Sam's country. Seems as if we might be in just as ticklish a scrape as ever Tom Sawyer and his chum ever struck."

"Now, that's what I was just thinking before you came along." affirmed the delighted Specs, quivering with the joy of himself experiencing something of the life of Mark Twain's famous boys. "And I sure do hope we'll be as lucky as they were about winning out."

"Same here, Specs," cooed Tom, dropping down as if weary, and mopping his streaming forehead with an already soaked handkerchief.

"By the way, what have you been doing with yourself all the afternoon?" asked Specs, putting his book aside as he started to eye his companion suspiciously.

"Oh! lots of things—I couldn't begin to enumerate 'em all if I tried," the other jauntily told him.

"Which is as good as saying you don't mean to tell me," grumbled the aggrieved Specs.

"Oh! well, have it your own way then. I know I might as well butt my head against a stone wall as to hope to coax you to own up, till you get good and ready."

"For one thing, then," chuckled Tom, "I set some snares for rabbits, because it happens there are lots of the bunnies on this island—I saw signs of them when we were on the way back from the *cache*. Of course I made these in some dense growth of the saw-palmetto, because it wouldn't pay to have any of the smuggler crowd run across the same for they'd give us away."

"Well, that's interesting news," admitted Specs, "Perhaps I ought to have been busy at some kind of useful job like that, instead of taking naps with Hop Hoofnagle, and burying myself in Tom Sawyer."

"I also found where a colony of birds, gulls and gannets, as well as pelicans, have their nesting-place. You remember we noticed a bunch flying up toward the further end of the island? Yes, and there are young birds on the ground, as well as a heap of eggs. With a little judgment it might be we could select a dozen fresh eggs, and have an omelet for a change."

"Better and better!" exclaimed the now smiling Specs. "What does escape your eyes I'd like to know, Tom Turner?"

"There's our Hop coming on the run, and from his excited looks I reckon he's got something worth while to tell us."

"Tom's either discovered that after all there was a smuggler sentinel left on the island, to keep an eye on that *cache;* or else glimpsed a vessel heading this way, and meaning to land here."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PORTABLE RADIO SET

POP soon arrived in camp. He was a bit winded after having hurried down from his lookout post, and excited in addition, so that his eyes fairly bulged out, while his breath came in gasps.

"It's heading this way, boys!" he exclaimed, even forgetting to make use of what Specs always termed his "Dutch brogue."

"Do you mean some kind of vessel?" asked Tom. "Calm down, Hop, so you can give us a straight story; there's nothing special to get excited about."

So Hop, swallowing hard several times, managed to recover his breath, and started to explain. He had noticed some black smoke on the horizon far away to the southeast, and watched it until finally he could make out a boat of some kind,—he thought it might be a tug, or perhaps a submarine-chaser, like those sold by the hundred by the Government during the last year or two, several of which

he had seen during a visit to Pensacola Navy Yard.

After extracting this information from the scout, of course nothing would do but that Tom and Specs must themselves walk up to the crown of the hill, to see with their own eyes; the tired Hop declining to accompany them. Once again did the crafty nature of the Turner boy show itself, for he made Specs follow him around to the other side of the hill, so that as they toiled upward toward the low crown of the elevation they would be screened from the quarter where the smoke was plainly to be noticed.

"You understand," he told his chum, when the latter started to complain about the additional distance this would necessitate their covering, "that aboard most vessels, big or little, they nowadays carry marine glasses; and I'm sure these smugglers wouldn't go without something along that order, because they could find heaps of uses for the same. If the skipper happened to be taking a survey of the island, not wanting to walk into a trap set by some smart revenue men during their absence, why he'd make us out on the hill; and there might be the dickens to pay—for us."

When Specs had digested this explanation he agreed that Tom's policy of caution—"safety first"—was well worth while.

Upon gaining the crown of the hill they lay upon their stomachs, and managed to crawl to a spot where it was possible for them to see the entire sweep of the Gulf lying toward the east and north—in fact, by turning their heads they could readily cover the entire circle.

The smoke was plainly visible, and after watching it for some little time both lads agreed that the boat making the smudge on the horizon was undoubtedly heading in a general line for their island.

"But you notice, Specs," Tom went on to say, "she's slackened her speed even since we've been up here. That goes to tell how her skipper doesn't mean to land until some time after night sets in."

"Then Tom, you don't doubt they must be the smugglers who are using Maximo Island as a rendezvous, and a hiding place for their stock of imported hard stuff?"

"Oh! that goes without question," came the assurance. "Of course we don't know just what they're aiming to do here tonight—perhaps they're fetching another fat cargo, to put

with the rest; then again, like as not they've got prospective buyers aboard, who are to give the stock the once over, and pay for the same, taking chances for running it ashore sooner or later in their own speed boats."

"Are you through watching them?" inquired Specs, when he saw his chum commence to back down, as if ready to quit the survey.

"I've seen all I want to for the present," Tom informed him; "and if we mean to have some hot supper, it's up to us to get it ready before the sun goes down. We know how to make a fire without much smoke; but it would be another thing to have one going after night comes, and not betray our camp by the illumination."

"Huh! some more of your strategy, seems like, Tom; but I'll say it's all to the good. Yes, and depend on me to make our fire give us what heat we want, and yet not show smoke; but both of us must keep an eye on Hop; he's always wanting to help so much, in his good-natured fashion, and might, when we happened to be looking another way, toss on some stuff that would send up a regular pall of black smoke."

On arriving at the camp they answered the natural questions fired in a broadside by Hop; at the same time trying to impress upon him the necessity for silence and caution.

"Leave the fire business severely alone, Hop," Specs told him, with unction, and a waving forefinger; "I'll select such stuff as I want to burn in cooking our supper, because we shouldn't make the least bit of smoke that might be seen by those smuggler fellows. Get that, do you? Well, just sit down, and take things easy; when supper's ready I'll whisper the fact to you both."

It was rather to the credit of Specs that the fire he built up, while of sufficient size to give him all the heat needed so as to boil the coffee, did not seem to generate any smoke whatsoever. Hop saw, and wondered, possibly realizing more than ever before in his life how these fellows with whom he had been accidentally thrown in contact when on a camping cruise, had really gotten many of the secrets of forest lore down to a fine art, reaching a lofty pinnacle to which he could never hope to climb.

So they finally had their simple supper before the sun sank out of sight in the west, a part

of the watery horizon that lay like a line drawn in a circle, with the island for its centre.

"Now we'll put out our fire," announced Tom; and noting the look, almost of consternation, on Hop's rosy face, he hastened to add: "yes, it's true I *did* tell you it was going to be kept up continually; but circumstances alter cases. There would always be some chance that one of those smuggler chaps might whiff smoke in the air, and get suspicious; because you can smell a fire even when you can't see anything of it. Another thing I forgot to mention—I picked something up when coming into camp after my tramp. Here you are!"

With which words he leaned back, and uncovering some object concealed under a little heap of palmetto leaves, held it up.

Specs uttered a low cry, as of genuine satisfaction.

"Sure thing, I ought to know that same baking-powder can; it's the same one I stuffed full of matches in our kitchen at home. I just *knew* I hadn't gone and left it behind; but where did you find it, Tom, old scout?"

"In the scrub alongside the path we followed when coming up from the boat last night," explained the other, with a grin. "Must have

slipped out of your bundle without you knowing it, and has been lying snug there, partly hidden, all this time. The rain wet the paper label, and the paste gave way, for you can see it's partly gone. It was a ray of sun glinting on the exposed tin that accidentally caught my eye. I wasn't much surprised, because I knew you had fetched it along; only all of us were gumps not to have hunted through that same scrub stuff."

"Vell, I *am* stumped—gan you peat dot?" the astonished Hop was heard to say, as he leaned his satisfaction over the remarkable way things seemed to turn out whenever Tom Turner put his hand to the plow.

It was still daylight when Tom went over to the pile of camp duffle, turning to where his mates were sitting meditatively, and carrying with him one of his late bundles, the one Specs had admitted was of considerable weight.

"Hello! what's in the wind now, I wonder?" the latter remarked, showing considerable interest, it might be noticed, as though he could give a fairly good guess as to the facts, if put to the test.

"Py chimineddy!" I do pelieve me he vas going to gif us some moosic py der pand, mep-

pe yet some monkey-shines like dose cutups dey has up in New Yorrick keeps you roaring mit, ven dey gets on de air-line nights."

"Well," Tom explained, as he started opening his package," as we're likely to be kept up at all hours of the night, while those men are on the island doing their job, I don't see anything to hinder our having a little amusement, to help pass the time away. I've got a pair of head-phones with me, so we can keep on taking turns; or if we feel like it, divide up, two of us listening in at the same time, and changing around to suit all tastes."

"Sounds good to me," assented Specs, "and as you say it will help us stay awake. Hop, here, hasn't had much chance to listen in over the radio, and here's a fat chance to give him the fever; so some fine day we'll see him quit turning up his lip at the craze, and even stringing up an aerial in his back yard."

"Meppe so," mused the Hoofnagle boy, with a nod, showing how he was in a humor to be converted then and there. "Idt vould nodt pe sooch a surprises of I climb me der pandvagon I am vaiting to pe convinced."

"What's this I see, Tom," remarked the deeply interested Specs, when the other had

fully unwrapped a special article in the big and cumbersome package. "Why, that doesn't look one bit like the bully set at your house, the talking machine used as its loud speaker?"

"Well, hardly," chuckled Tom, greatly amused because of the surprise he had craftily managed to spring on his nearest chum. "This is a dandy baby-grand set—a pocket edition I call it, to be carried around easily in an overnight bag, or a suitcase, if you happen to be traveling. All you have to do when you reach your hotel room at evening is to put it on a table, adjust a few little connections, connect with the waste pipe of your stationary wash basin, throw a wire for an aerial out of the window, and begin to listen in."

"You must have made it yourself, then," asserted the admiring Specs, immediately commencing to examine the small compact cabinet with the keen interest of a genuine radio "bug."

"Just what I did," Tom casually informed him.

"Huh! all of which explains some things," snorted Specs, grinning amiably; "particularly why you wouldn't come over to my house on certain nights, and holidays. Must have been amusing yourself pottering with this dandy

litter receiving set. I see you're putting two vacuum-tubes in place. Hope they didn't get shaken up too much when your old boat got to pitching like a bucking broncho."

"Oh! I looked out for all that," the confident Tom assured him. "I had 'em packed just as if they were eggs. They seem to be all right, as far as I can tell until I test 'em out—plate, grid and filament ready to buckle down to business when I harness things up, and get my ground wire set."

"But, Tom, seems to me they're just a bit different from those you have been using in your big set?"

"You said it, Specs," chuckled the other. "These tubes have a special filament, and the current is so low that it may receive its supply from an ordinary dry battery—of course supplemented with a relay of B batteries. They say it will work with even the battery of a flashlight; though I've never gone so far as to try *that* game. You notice I've fetched two dry batteries along, so as to make a dead sure thing of it."

"That long head of yours, Tom, doesn't often get left at the post. But is this bully

little set able to pick up distant stations, or do you have to depend on nearby points?"

"I want to tell you it's a regular *marvel,* Specs. It handles wave lengths from two hundred to seven hundred meters, with ease."

Specs, duly impressed, ventured a low whistle to register his surprise; he also bent another look upon the compact miniature cabinet, as if it were impressing itself on his mind most favorably.

"Then you've tested it out at home, Tom, I reckon?" he asked.

"Thoroughly, and found it to work like a charm," the other assured him. "I had it in my own room, for a number of reasons, among which was to spring a little game on you when we made our trip to Cat Island."

"Oh! then *this* was what you've been grinnig about so often—the surprise you've been keeping up your sleeve so long, eh?" Specs demanded.

Tom gave him a quizzical look, which seemed to say:

"I'm not telling everything I know, so you just hold your horses, and wait till I get ready to lift the lid."

"What stations have you succeeded in getting with this plaything, I'd like to know?" persisted the as yet not wholly convinced Specs.

"Among others, when the static would allow me, I had Havana lots of times; then there were Atlanta, Forth Worth (Texas), Detroit, New York City, Pittsburgh—oh, aplenty of 'em, Specs, never you fear. It's a regular little giant of a receiving set, you'll discover. I made some bad breaks when I was setting it up, and had to experiment a heap; but in the end I got it giving satisfaction. Here, take this insulated wire, and toss it up over that tree-branch close to the trunk. You see it has a stone tied to the end of it for that purpose, which you're to let hang down."

Specs after several attempts managed to accomplish this result.

"And is that to be all the aerial you'll need?" he asked in amazement.

"You'll soon see," came the laughing response. "Why, with this set you can throw a wire on the floor, and get splendid results. I've used the electric socket in my room, and found it answered O. K. Honest to goodness, Specs, sometimes I begin to believe this baby

set is possessed of magical powers, and can snatch music out of the air, just as you would pick cherries, or anything like that. Next for the ground wire, and then everything will be ready, with my new B batteries in place. Now watch my smoke, Specs; and you too, Hop."

He attached the head-phones to his ears, and commenced fiddling with the dials on the panel of his portable set, while both other boys watched his every movement with critical interest; Hop's mouth was open, and his eyes distended, as though in truth he were already commencing to be inoculated with the very catching virus of radio delight. Tom knew very well his subjugation was sure to be complete before another hour had passed, since he already exhibited all the signs of surrender.

Several minutes passed, and all recollection had been forgotten of the strange conditions surrounding them, as well as the thrilling fact that a boatload of desperate smugglers was at that very moment drawing near the island on which they had been marooned.

Then Tom, nodding happily, as though vastly pleased, deliberately removed the head-phones, and quickly adjusted the same on Specs.

"Tell me what you think of *that* for a little affair you could almost carry around with you in your pocket?" he demanded, proudly; "there's some static, of course; always is hanging around summer-times down South here; but you can get that bed-time story being spoken away up in New York City just as if the speaker was sitting over by Hop there."

## CHAPTER XIII

### WHEN THE SMUGGLERS LANDED

"AS CLEAR as a bell!" announced the surprised and delighted Specs, shortly afterwards, showing vast pleasure. "I think you must be a regular wizard, Tom Turner, to get such results with a makeshift receiving set like this—for after all that's what you be apt to call it. I own up its clearer even than your big set at home; and with only a single dry battery too."

"Backed by my four B batteries, of course," corrected Tom.

As for Hop, he had begun to suspicion that the others were only "stringing him"—pretending all this just to hoodwink him. A look of unbelief, touching on scorn, had commenced to creep across his round face.

"*Aber!* meppe idt iss so," he muttered, shaking his head stubbornly after the manner of a skeptic; "put you got to show me yet."

"As easy as falling off a log," chirped Specs, hastening to remove the head phones, and ad-

justing them so as to cover the ears of the unbeliever.

Then he sat back, and in the gathering dusk of coming night watched the round face of Hop, anxious to learn how his doubts and suspicions were put to rest, once and forever.

Gradually expression of great surprise began to show upon that countenance, gradually widening into a broad and happy grin. Hop looked first at Specs, and then at Tom himself, possibly to make certain that neither of his companions would prove to be the speaker whose voice sounded as though not over ten feet away.

"Vell, vell, dis iss der vonderfullest dings I haf ever struck all der times off my lifes. Undt do you mean to dell me, Tom, dot feller iss avay off a thousand miles, in New Yorrick; undt dot you haf pick up his voice right out off der air?"

"That's the game, Hop," he was assured; "and maybe before we get away from this same island you'll learn something even more wonderful than hearing a bed-time story of Brer Rabbit, spoken by some one that far away."

"Oh! is that so?" snapped the listening Specs, looking sharply at Tom, as though those old

suspicions of his, lately lulled to rest, had flashed up once more, stronger than ever. "Seems to me, Tom Turner, you're never happy unless you're pulling the wool over your chums' eyes, and bedeviling 'em like with all sorts of mysterious hints. Oh! well, if it pleases you it doesn't hurt me any, and I reckon I can wait up till you get good and ready to show your hand."

"Suppose we leave Hop here a bit, to listen in, and get acquainted with the joy of radio stuff; while we creep up to the top of our hill, and make use of our lookout again, eh, Specs?"

"You've suddenly recollected about those rum-runners, and their boat; and want to see if they're still heading for our island here—is that your scheme, Tom?"

"You're on, boy," he was told. "It might be worth our while to grab hold of all the facts in the case before night settles down for keeps. Going to be as black as your pocket, in the bargain; besides, I thought I could see distant lightning over there in the southwest, which would account for a lot of that static, and scratching."

"Py chimineddy!" ejaculated the listening Hop; "iss dot vot makes sooch awful noises all der times? I haf thought me dot feller vot dells der nightcap story he haf a pad coldt in his heat. Undt so dot iss der lightnings ve are listening to? I never pelieve anypody can *hear* lightning; idt vos always der dunder vat makes me yump oudt off my skins. Put dis iss a vonderful age, undt I am myselluf glad I am living in so up-to-date times. Put Tom, I hopes der is nodt any danger py dot lightnings—I should nodt like to pe knocked indo a cocked hat pefore you couldt say Jack Robinson?"

"Don't worry, Hop," the other assured him, "the lightning that makes such sudden scratching sounds through the ear phones, just like you hear when you've got a badly marred record on your Victrola, is miles and miles distant. When a storm is right at hand, of course we never think to try and use a radio set; although even then a lightning arrester prevents you from being struck."

Hop looked relieved.

"Oh! vell," he was heard to say, as the other two started off on their little scouting expedition, "off der lightning-rod she pe in position,

I dells me der risk idt don't gount for mooch. Go ahead, poys, undt me, I vill sthick tight here, like glue, to dis ped-time story-teller who talks so fine."

Specs noticed that his comrade again circled around to the further side of the elevation. Although it was rapidly growing dark, at the same time cautious Tom played his regular game of "safety first;" for there was always a little chance that some keen vision might discover their moving figures about the time they stood near the summit, outlined against the clear sky in silhouette.

Upon reaching the crown of the hill they again flattened themselves out on the ground, and proceeded to try and locate the suspicious looking boat, smoke from which had attracted their notice late that same afternoon.

"There's a light on the water away off yonder," speedily announced the keen-eyed Specs, who surely had nothing the matter with his vision, even though compelled under the orders of a local optician to wear glasses, so as to ease eye-strain that had threatened to become serious later on if not promptly attended to in his youth.

"I just picked it up," the Turner boy explained, for it was not often that any comrade could get ahead of him.

"It's moving all right, too." continued Specs, growing more and more excited, it seemed, from the tremor in his voice, and the way his breath came in gasps. "They're sure meaning to land here, I reckon, don't you, Tom?"

"No question about that, son."

"Oh! I wonder—" began Specs, as though seized with a sudden inspiration, of such magnitude that he almost hesitated mentioning it to his pal.

"As what?" demanded Tom still watching that swiftly advancing light, that stood for thrilling adventure in his young eyes, recalling much he had read in books like Robinson Crusoe, Treasure Island, and the like, so dear to the heart of boyhood the English-speaking world over.

"But then I suppose it *would* be taking too great chances for us to even think of doing such a bold thing," muttered Specs, in a disappointed tone.

"As what?" asked the other again, bent on getting an answer.

"Oh! well, I was hoping—that if they *did* land below at the little lagoon, and started anything going, we might be hiding somewhere close by, so as to glimpse the whole job; but just as you think best, Tom."

The other boy chuckled.

"Oh! shucks! that was already all fixed in my mind, Specs," he went on to say, in the most matter-of-fact tone imaginable.

"Do you mean that we might take chances, and try it out, Tom?" eagerly queried the other, excitedly.

"We'll start down the hill right away," Tom assured him; "going first of all to the camp, so as to warn Hop not to make the least sound while we're on the scout, but to amuse himself listening-in to what music there might be in the air. I'll fix it for him all right, though of course we don't know what kind of interesting program 492 meters—which is WEAF, New York City, has got for tonight; but then there's always aplenty of good stuff sent out from the Capitol Theatre station well worth listening to."

They made their way down the hill, once more on the side away from the light marking the position of the advancing boat. On arriv-

ing in the neighborhood of their camp they could hear Hop laughing, a little more boisterously than strict prudence might allow.

"Say, that was a regular jim-dandy of a song, and don't you forget it, fellows," he told his mates, when they reached his side; and even neglecting, as usual to indulge in his Dutch dialect stuff. "It's all over with me but the shouting, Tom; no more making fun of radio, believe *me!* why, already I've got it figured out in my mind just where I'll string my aerial—but then, what's the use of bothering about antennae when you've got it fixed so that such things ain't at all necessary. My stars! I could sit here and take in such a show, all night long, and never feel tired."

"Never mind taking off the head-phones, Hop," said Tom, quickly; "you can sit at your ease here, and keep listening in to the concert that will soon be in full swing. Specs and myself feel we ought to know just what brings that boatload of smugglers back here again; you won't feel nervous while we're gone, will you, Hop?"

The Hoofnagle boy scratched his head, as if a bit uneasy; then recollecting how he had a reputation—that of the family to which he

belonged—to live up to, he assumed a boldness he hardly felt, as he went on to say:

"You vill pe goming pack soon, ain't idt, Tom, oldt chap? You pet my life I ain't afraid off noddings yet, here on dis lofty island off der pirates. Yust you pelieve I vill lie here, undt dring idt all in like soda vater at Doc Horseman's drug-store fountain."

"I knew you too well to believe you'd feel timid, Hop," Tom remarked, with subtle flattery in his tones. "But promise me you'll keep as still as a mouse all the time we're away. Nobody can tell how those men might take a notion to move around; and even if you laughed, as you did a few minutes back, they might hear the sound, and fall on you like a thousand of brick."

"Py shinks! you gan drust Hop Hoofnagle to keep mum, poys, all der times you vos absent like. Dot's me—my name idt is Oyster, for I keeps my lips closed tight as der drum."

"All right, but see that you don't meddle with any dials or plugs here because you'd be apt to queer the whole game. Even if nothing comes along, all you've got to do is to sit tight, and wait. You're not going to be shut out of the concert if you hold your horses, and

keep listening. Come along, Specs, we'd better be moving, if we hope to get located before the boat reaches the shore."

So they left Hop squatting there like a huge toad, the head phones clapped to his ears, and he himself the picture of an ardent radio fan.

"I've located the place in my mind, so we'll have no trouble about finding camp, no matter how dark it gets," Tom was whispering, as they started to pass around the base of the low hill, meaning to head in the quarter where the outlet of the fine spring joined the little but deep lagoon, and which it was already settled in their minds must be the spot where boats came in, and either landed their cargoes, or else loaded up with cases, when the selected night arrived for running the smuggled stuff ashore to where certain motor trucks were awaiting its coming.

It was not long before they found a hiding-place fairly close to the spot where the landing was most likely to take place. They had not been located more than ten minutes when a light appeared in view, and the sound of a marine engine reached their ears.

Soon afterwards the boat was made fast, exactly where they had already figured this

would take place. More lights started up, illuminating the scene, and also allowing the concealed spectators a chance to watch everything that went on.

Men began to come ashore over a gangplank, each one carrying some sort of burden. The boys had no need of speculating concerning the character of those same packages, for they readily saw each and every one was a small but compact wooden box or case, undoubtedly similar to those they had discovered in the secret *cache*—made in far-away Scotland, and containing a certain number of bottled contraband.

It stood to reason that both boys were more or less thrilled by the consciousness of the exciting nature of their adventure. It would certainly be something well worth telling, when once more safe back in the dull little old home town of Gulfport; although some of their mates might feel disposed to discount their narrative, and demand more positive proof as to its truth, which Tom felt he would be obliged to procure, not liking the idea of being held up as a fabricator, or a fictitious yarn boaster.

The men from the boat were carrying the additional cases—doubtless the balance of a lot

that had come from the Old Country in a cargo landed at Nassau in the Bahamas—direct to the *cache,* and depositing them there, against their disposal to certain speed launches that might even then be *en route* for the rendezvous; since the darkness of the night made it a golden opportunity for safe rum-running craft.

Inside of half an hour the job seemed to have been completed, for the string of incoming cases no longer continued to move toward the now overloaded *cache,* so that they were leaving many of the last to arrive outside.

Tom in a whisper called the attention of his pal to this significant fact, which he went on to explain.

"I take it that means they are dead certain some sort of craft is bound to be along between now and midnight; for if that wasn't so they's never let all those cases stay around, in plain sight of any revenue agent who might happen through luck to land here."

"You mean speed boats, of course, Tom?" whispered Specs, in return.

"Well, it may be that," came back in the same cautious undertone; "and then again perhaps the stuff is going to find its way

across to the mainland by way of some avenue besides the water of the Gulf."

"Now, what do you mean by saying that, I'd like to know, Tom?"

"Oh! for instance, remember how we noticed that elegant level stretch of ground just beyond here—if you asked me I'd say it couldn't be beaten as an A Number One field for starting up in the air, or dropping down from the clouds, just as happened to be necessary."

Specs grunted his surprise.

"The airplane route for smuggling, eh?" he whispered. "Well, well, I'm getting to a point where nothing staggers me much, so many queer happenings are coming along; like a flock of partridges in a grain field in the Fall. See here, is that only a *guess* on your part?"

"Now that you could mention," chuckled Tom. "I own up I glimpsed certain marks on the ground, which I knew must have been made by rubber-tired wheels, and all going up and down the field; which gave the thing dead away to me, because I knew only the wheels under a plane would leave such tell-tale marks behind."

"There, that boat's going to get away, for men are unfastening the rope that served as cables, you can see, Tom."

"But keep quiet, Specs, even after she put out to sea," cautioned Tom, "because I counted ten men come off the boat, while only six went back. They are leaving some of their number here—for a purpose you understand, Specs."

"I hear *something* over there in the direction where the mainland lies," was the burden of his communication. "Sounds mighty like the buzz of an airplane motor and propeller, too, Tom."

"I get it, Specs," came the cautious reply, "and I agree with you, for there's no mistaking the sound. My guess seems to be a good one, looks like right now; and by keeping quiet, and lying here we'll see a sight few boys ever had a chance of looking on—the landing of a smuggler plane, and its getting clear again, after a cargo has been put aboard."

They continued to listen and thrill with fresh expectations. The oncoming plane was fast bearing down upon the island of gruesome legends, where that hoary old pirate, Maximo, of historical notoriety, had in years long gone by made his headquarters; and, reports insisted,

buried much treasure in its sands, although there was no authenticated account of any valuables having been dug up by the numerous eager seekers.

Before now the waiting men by the lagoon had caught the sound of the drumming motor, and the rapidly revolving propeller, for such stirring accompaniments of an airplane's flight through space can be heard miles away, when the brooding silences of night hold full sway, and especially is this true over a wide expanse of water.

They had hurried up to the open stretch close by the lagoon, and lights were brought into play, reflectors of some sort, possibly patterned after the head-lights of a superior make of automobile. These were focussed in such a fashion as to illuminate the level stretch from end to end, giving the plane pilot abundance of opportunities for making a safe landing.

"There she comes," whispered Tom, presently, as both continued to strain their eyes in an effort to be the first to locate the approaching airship.

What might have been taken for a star was now seen to be moving rapidly, and heading straight toward the island.

"They mean to circle around abit, so as to come to land against the night breeze, and with the whole length of that narrow field ahead," Tom explained, as though quite accustomed to all manner of aerial doings.

# CHAPTER XIV

## CONTRABAND

THE sound of the boat's swiftly revolving propeller gradually died away, and they could no longer catch a fleeting glimpse of her lights to seaward. Still, the consciousness that some of those who had come on the vessel had stayed behind, perhaps to assist in putting a cargo aboard some other smaller and more speedy boat; or else as Tom had suggested, an airplane that could land on the even ground beyond—caused the two boys more or less uneasiness.

Supposing the smugglers remained there until dawn, and then the discovery that a lone catboat was stranded on the eastern shore of the island—might they not begin to have disturbing suspicions, under the head of there being strangers somewhere near by, who may have learned of that valuable *cache* in the odd cleft between the twin ridges?"

Under such conditions a close search was likely to be inaugurated, and this could hardly

proceed without revealing the camp of the trio. What would happen then neither Tom nor Specs could attempt to say; and even vague speculation proved anything but pleasant, or profitable. Smugglers as a rule are supposed to be desperate fellows, ready to take their lives in their hands while defying the regularly constituted authorities of the State; so, too, it seemed to stand to reason such chaps would not care the snap of their fingers as to the well being of those they feared were spies set upon their track, being suspicious of every one.

It certainly did begin to look as though dangers were gathering thick and fast all around them. Boys however, seldom give way to worry, though under certain conditions, like those facing poor Hop Hoofnagle, a haunting fear might keep them from sleeping soundly at night, and often stab them during wakeful hours.

They continued to lie there in their snug covert, with perhaps as much as a full half hour passing. Then Specs suddenly clutched the arm of his chum, and bending over whispered hoarsely in Tom's nearer ear. Now it was dropping gracefully for a landing, and

Tom felt compelled to admire the wonderful skill manifested in the handling of the plane, under such difficult condition.

"Ten to one the man who acts as air pilot to that machine," was what he breathed into the ear of his chum, "served his time in France, and saw plenty of desperate work there in the bargain."

"Yes, lots of those fliers are out of a job these days," came back from the other lad; "and this sort of dangerous business appeals to them a heap more than just taking up people for a little spin in the air. Besides, I warrant you there's big money in the risky game."

"It certainly is risky," Tom agreed, "for they have to meet the usual dangers an air pilot has to run up against, and besides that take chances of being shot to pieces by some hidden Coast Guard, or revenue man, lying in ambush along the shore."

"Worse even than that, Tom, I've been reading lately how these bootleggers up North are stopped on the road from Canada, and the Jersey coast creeks, when driving motor trucks loaded with smuggled stuff, and robbed of everything. I remember they called these up-to-date highwaymen or land pirates hijackers.

Well, he's made the landing as neat as a new pin. Now to watch them load the stuff."

"Looks like an extra big plane they're using, Specs; and it wouldn't surprise me now to learn that it was one of those Martin bombers we used to read so much about in the papers. They are built to carry a large number of heavy bombs, and would make splendid smuggling air craft."

It was an intensely interesting sight to watch the waiting men from the sea-going boat load case after case aboard the bomber; until the watchers found themselves wondering where it was all being stowed.

"Do you think he can ever get his plane to mount again, with all that weighty cargo to hoist?" whispered the skeptical Specs.

"Oh! I reckon the pilot is keeping tabs, and knows to a fraction just the exact number of cases he can manage," Tom assured him. "But it looks as if they've reached the limit now, for you can see the pilot in his regimentals conferring with one of the crew, I reckon an officer, too; and they seem to be comparing counts. There, he's hauling out a big wad of bills, and is going to pay for his bunch of cases. This is a spot cash game,

seems like, as if the risks were too great for any credit. If he does land that cargo he'll have doubled his money by selling it to some one waiting ashore. A great game it's become, I should say."

"Yes, a great way of beating Uncle Sam, and flooding our whole country with the strong stuff sent over from Scotland and Ireland." Specs was saying, with considerable bitterness in his low-pitched voice. "Where do you reckon he's aiming to make a landing, Tom?"

"That's something nobody but himself knows, Specs, and I'm sure I can't put you wise. But there are a thousand places where such a smuggler plane could drop down; and no one not wise to the fact would have any suspicion such a slick craft lay hidden in a lonely glade amidst the trees, perhaps with swampland all around. The revenue men don't discover where these birds land, and so the voyages are being carried out nightly, here, there, and everywhere along the coast."

"It makes me grit my teeth," said Specs, wrathfully.

"That's all very well, and I reckon the feeling does you a heap of credit, showing your decent bringing-up, Specs; but we've got to

remember we're in a peck of trouble ourselves, and the first thing that ought to engage our attention would be getting ashore safe and sound."

"Just the same," continued the other, at the same time not neglecting proper caution in regulating his voice, "I'd be tickled half to death to be able to do something or other, so as to swat this dreadful conspiracy, and make a little dent in the same. And Tom, if you can only think up some way we could lend Uncle Sam a helping hand I'd be glad to hear the same."

"All right, then, if anything slips into my mind that shows promise of success I'll let you know about it instantly, Specs. Watch now, and see the old bomber rise like a bird."

"There she starts along the field!" exclaimed Specs, quivering with the dramatic possibilities of the situation.

Eagerly did they follow the course of the plane, and as it finally took an upward slant Specs had difficulty in repressing the shout that seemed on his lips.

"I say he's a jim-dandy air pilot, all the same, smuggler or not," the enthusiastic lad ventured.

"Not so loud, Specs," pleaded Tom. "Those men are coming back now to the shore, and might hear you. We'd be wise to either pull out, or else lie low, to see what else happens around this enchanted island, where it strikes me the ghost of old Maximo might be hiding, and getting points on the doings of these up-to-date pirates and buccaneers."

"Do you reckon there are other planes expected, Tom?"

"Something doing, all right, kid," returned the other, loftily; "because already those men are fetching more cases out of the *cache,* and piling the same ready. It looks to me as if the next visitor might be a speed boat from the Florida mainland, coming to load up, and try to slip past the Government watchers. They'll never knock this contraband stuff out until the whole coast is lined with guards; and hundreds of boats able to outrun the smuggler craft guard every bay, and little inlet, along the entire Atlantic seaboard, and the Gulf coast in the bargain."

"Whee! Uncle Sam has sure got a big job on his hands," ventured Specs, as if overwhelmed by the magnitude of the survey.

"It can only be brought up with a round turn, my dad says, when they go to work, and make the penalty fit the crime. Fines are of no use whatever, because the profits of the smuggling are so immense that the men arrested can easily afford to pay the fine, and even lose their boat, or machine; for they count on a dozen successful trips before running foul of the rocks."

"I don't think we'll have long to wait, Tom, because I just glimpsed another moving light out yonder; this time on, and not far above the water. Your speed boat is coming in turn, so this must be a regular delivery night."

In due course of time the watching boys saw a small but well built boat come slowly and cautiously up the miniature lagoon, the man at the wheel evidently well aware of the danger he ran of getting aground.

When it was finally warped to the shore by means of a cable, several men landed, and there followed a consultation with those already ashore. After that a start was made carrying aboard case after case of the contents of the secret *cache*.

"Gee! whiz! they're taking a whopping big load," whispered the deeply interested Specs,

as he dropped his head so as to rest his aching neck muscles; "that last one made an even two hundred cases. Must be worth a small fortune, at the bootleg prices ranging in the papers."

"Two hundred, even count; and they're through," added Tom.

"Reckon they've made a dent in that receiving vault," Specs ventured. "But say, the supply is unlimited, and like as not by tomorrow night that big carrier boat will be back again with a fresh cargo. What a burning shame to have these chaps, foreigners I reckon, many of 'em, too, playing such high jinks with Uncle Sam's custom laws."

Specs' indignation had a good foundation, first through the fact that he had always been an unusually patriotic boy, often bemoaning the cruel Fate that kept him from being one of those loyal sons of the Republic volunteering to go across seas to France, when the Government called for fighting men—for at that time he chanced to be a mere stripling in short trousers, and playing his first year in real baseball.

Then again his father was a leading lawyer of that section of the State, so that Specs

heard a great deal in his home of how the laws of the land were being so recklessly broken, by rich and poor alike.

The two chums lingered until they saw the bootleg craft well on her way, to seek a safe hidingplace in some lonely lagoon on the Florida gulf coast; from which isolated spot her illicit cargo of contraband could be run *via* motor-truck, and under cover of night, to centers of population, where it would net them a handsome profit.

Then they determined it was time for them to return to their camp.

## CHAPTER XV

### GLOOMY FOREBODINGS

"DID you manage to catch anything they were saying, just before the boat pulled out?" asked Specs, while they were passing around the foot of the low hill, and heading for the spot where Hop Hoofnagle had been left.

"Not half as much as I would have liked," came the reply; "even though I held my breath, and strained my hearing to beat the band. I did manage to get a few broken sentences here and there; and once I felt sure I caught the word 'Buenaventure', which it struck me was the name of a little bay I had noticed, when studying the Florida coast, down as far as Cedar Keys."

"Huh! that ought to give us something of a clue," ventured Specs. "They must have a secret landing somewhere, and why not in that bay? Just keep tab of it, Tom, and we'll post the folks at home—if we're lucky enough to get back safe again. Your dad

ought to communicate with the Government officers, and post 'em. Remember we had a swift revenue motorboat in at Gulfport only ten days ago, and your father had the commander, Lieutenant Davis over to dinner, they being old friends. Say, maybe he wouldn't be tickled to learn about this smugglers' Paradise; and what we've learned."

The very thought of being fortunate enough to prove an aid to the Government of his beloved country appeared to please Specs Whittleby exceedingly, for he kept chuckling as he walked along at Tom's side.

Apparently the latter was wrestling with some serious question, since he made no further remark; but then that was nothing singular in Tom Turner, because he had a confirmed habit of taking counsel with himself.

So presently, without any sort of mishap they arrived close to camp. It was not so pitch dark but that they could see to avoid any pitfalls; and besides, on one or two occasions, when in doubt, what did Tom do but flash his little electric hand-torch with good results. He did not seem to have any fear the brief flash would be seen by the smugglers over at the lagoon.

As they came into camp he again used his light, and by this means they glimpsed Hop, sitting there cross-legged like a Turk. He had apparently tired of listening-in, for the head-phones had been discarded, and now lay on the ground beside him. Besides, his whole attitude was pensive, so that Tom felt certain the Hoofnagle boy must have allowed his thoughts to revert once more to his home in Gulfport; and the unhappy mystery of that letter overwhelmed any desire to listen to the further programme of WEAF, away up in New York City.

He seemed glad to have his comrades back again, and eagerly plied them with questions that caused Tom to relate all they had seen and heard.

"Did you get tired of listening to what my radio was telling?" Tom presently asked the other.

Once again did Hop neglect to indulge in his "brogue;" apparently it did not appeal strongly to him when in any distress of mind.

"Oh! I kept 'em on my ears a long time," he replied; "and say, it was a treat to get everything so clear and strong. This little cigar-box outfit of yours is sure a smart trick,

Tom; and I'd like to have an exact duplicate, if only you would help me build the same. But—you see—I heard so many queer sounds; and even saw weird lights moving across the sky, which were a deep mystery to me—and then to finish my fun, I got to worrying again about that miserable letter.

He heaved a sigh that seemed to well up from his very feet, showing what a deep hold the puzzling matter of that letter, and its fate, had taken upon his nature; all the more singular because Hop as a rule was merry hearted.

Tom made no further attempt to cheer him up, for he realized how useless all such efforts must be. Hop would have to wrestle with his gripping problem as best he could; perhaps a sudden inspiration might show him new light —something he had previously forgotten, or ignored, was likely to flash before his mind, and allow him to be absolutely sure he had really dropped the letter in the mail, as his father had asked him to make certain of doing, because it was of the utmost importance it left that afternoon.

They had already arranged their blankets, looking to having a fair night's sleep; and as Hop seemed utterly exhausted, Tom advised

that he crawl into his nest, fashioned by means of the extra red covering. This he was not in the least averse to doing, since his comrades being once more close by, his nervous depression, caused partly by lack of familiarity with such surroundings, with a dark night shutting him in, had gradually been dissipated.

Tom separated the head-phones, handing one part to Specs. Then, lying there at their ease on their blankets, the two radio fans proceeded to take in what was carried over so many hundreds of miles of air, and hear it fully as well as those within twenty miles of New York—perhaps even better, in many cases, thanks to the wonderful results of ingenious Tom's workmanship, his knowledge of filaments, coils, amplifiers, and radio equipment in general.

Later on, when convinced that Hop was actually lost in the land of dreams, Tom and Specs discarded their harness. They were actually too tired for any real enjoyment; besides that they felt in need of sleep, of which there was much to make up for previous wakeful nights.

Then Tom wished to have a little heart-to-heart talk with his best chum, concerning the

critical situation by which they found themselves confronted. It was far from being a joking proposition, with a number of reckless smugglers so near by, who might be tempted to resort to unpleasant measures. Should they discover the three shipwrecked lads, they might be inclined to suspect the campers knew all about the secret *cache*—the coming and going of the large boat that ferried the contraband across from Cuba, it might be—the up-to-date methods employed, by means of which cargoes of illicit and contraband goods were being swiftly and successfully taken, by means of an airplane, to points inland, where prowling agents were unknown and a safe landing could be readily effected.

"Of course," Tom was saying, earnestly, "I don't believe these men would be cruel enough to want to harm us bodily; but they have a lot at stake, and would be apt to figure on keeping us here on this island—well, indefinately—until they were through using it as a rendezvous, and a hidingplace for the cargoes they are running nightly. So you can see how we're up against a tough proposition, Specs."

"Huh! looks like it might be that way, Tom," the other admitted, moodily, as though certain hopes which he had been cherishing had received a knock-out blow. "If they feel that way, I reckon now the idea we were talking over—putting a distress signal on the top of our hill here, like Robinson Crusoe did—is smashed on the head ker plunk!"

"They'd never stand for that, I'm dead sure, Specs. You can see the last thing they want is to have attention directed to Maximo Island, which folks have long since gotten out of the habit of visiting; because there isn't much of anything to be found here, saving a few rabbits, some clams and such stuff. The only chance we'd have of fetching help, and a rescue, would be to try some other means, with which these ignorant smugglers do not happen to be familiar."

"If only we could think of some way, I'd be delighted," said Specs, wistfully, as though inviting his comrade to brush up those bright wits of his, and invent some method for sending out a call for help that would be worth while.

But Tom, however he might feel about the subject, did not advance a single proposition;

though Specs half fancied he heard his pal chuckling in an amused way. For himself he could not see what there was humorous in the sad pickle in which they had gotten themselves. If forced to stay on Maximo, and subsist on what they could pick up in the way of small game, fish, birds eggs, and shellfish, should a supply of such be found, a dreary life must be theirs.

Then, too, Specs could not but think of the increasing agony of mind on the part of their home folks, as days crept past without the slightest clue concerning the fate of the three absent boys. It must be suspected they had been caught in the sudden gale; and since a search of Cat Island would tell the story of how they had apparently never reached that haven, their fate would be a cruel mystery. No wonder, then, Specs lay awake a long time after turning in, unable to forget his troubles, and get the much needed sleep.

# CHAPTER XVI

## DESPERATE REMEDIES

APPARENTLY Specs had been hugging some sort of forlorn hope to his heart, that the four smugglers migh have quitted the island during the night, aboard a small powerboat which the boys had noticed, moored in a nook of the lagoon, and undoubtedly left behind for some unknown purpose by the skipper of the larger craft that conveyed the contraband there.

His eagerness to creep up to the crown of the hill, and see how things were looking over at the landing place, was proof of this in Tom's mind. So when later on Specs once more showed up, he could tell from the frown on the other's freckled face that disappointment had been his lot.

"They're still hanging around, worse luck, Tom," grumbled the Whittleby son and heir, disconsolately; "so I reckon chances are ten to one we're going to be run across by those law scoffers."

"I'm figuring on such a thing happening," Tom told him, coolly, as though not altogether hopeless concerning results, even should this come about. "It stands to reason that as soon as we've cleaned out our supply of grub, we must lay hold of more, or else starve. Well, how could we trap small game, and catch fish; or even tread out clams, without their learning of our presence?"

"Yes, that's a fact," agreed Specs, trying to brighten up a bit; "but we ought to have a programme laid out, to follow, when we do run across that crowd."

"Then Specs, let's try to act as if we took them for honest fishermen, and believed they would be glad to do something to put us ashore. If they think we are green about what's going on here, they may fall for it, and take us off in a hurry, only too glad to get rid of intruders whose room is better than their company."

"Yes, but on the other hand," Specs hastened to say, uneasily, "if so be they suspect we know a heap too much to be trusted, they'll find plenty of excuses for not taking us off, or even allowing us to signal for help. Well, what can't be cured has to be endured, my dad always says; and we've got to make the

best of a bad bargain. I more than half believe they'll just keep us over here, with a guard, so's to prevent us from seeing anything when boats or planes land; also supply us with starvation rations until they're good and ready to call the game off, and quit this island. Huh! that might not come about for *months;* and think what living skeletons we'll be by that time; our folks at home will want to shut the door in our faces, like we were freaks from some show. It's mighty tough luck, that's all I can say."

Nevertheless, despite his down-hearted feeling, it might be noticed how Specs still had his appetite with him when breakfast was ready, for he did not let anything pass him by.

It was not a bounteous or a satisfactory meal. First of all it lacked in both quantity and quality, which alone would have marked it pretty much of a failure in the line of a camping breakfast. Then again they were forced to restrain their natural boisterous ways, almost creeping around so as to not attract attention, keeping their voices toned down to a low pitch, and having only an apology of a fire on which they ventured to make a pot of exceedingly weak coffee—"dishwater" Tom

scornfully termed the concoction, though the cook showed him what a small amount of the ground berry was left, to account for his apparent stinginess.

A dreary outlook confronted them, for what could they do to pass the time away, with any and all movements restricted, for fear of discovery.

Tom, accustomed to "taking the bull by the horns," had a scheme to propose which he was not long in setting before his mates; and Specs in particular, since Hop hardly counted, being ready to "sneeze whenever either of the others took snuff," to make use of an old saying.

"It's this way," explained the Turner boy, argumentatively; "we are bound, it strikes me, sooner or later, to be found out by these chaps; so why not meet them more than half way. Let's seem to stumble on their camp, and show delight over meeting up with other human critters. We'll try to let on as if we didn't have the least suspicion there was anything wrong here—that they must be just honest fishermen, come after a load of finny seafood for some big packing house at Apalatchicola, or Cedar Keys. If we can pull the wool over their eyes it'll be all right, and they'll

want to shunt us out here as quick as they can. On the other hand, if they suspect we've learned a heap more'n we let on, they'll make excuses for not allowing us to leave. We'll know how the land lies from one of these things."

Specs fell for the scheme immediately.

"I think that's a clever move, Tom," he agreed. "The sooner we know just where we stand the better I'll be pleased. But all of us must try to carry out the part, and seem as green as grass. Course I can see they'll wonder how we could be here since the storm, and not pick up something that looked fishy. It's all a case of toss-up, and which way luck falls."

So they determined to start off, leaving Hop to look after the duffle. Following the shore line they would eventually arrive at the lagoon, where the four marooned men had their camp. When the two boys came hurrying along, and showing all the signs of great excitement, accompanied with such joy as might naturally be supposed to accompany the discovery of others on the island, the test would be made—much depended on the gullibility of the smug-

glers, and their readiness to fall into the pit thus dug for their feet.

Hop disliked seeing them go, but knew no argument whereby he might coax his mates to take him along in their company. So he was forced to smile, and wish them all manner of luck in their plan of campaign.

"I sure hopes dot you will bring home der bacon, poys," he called out as they left him, also waving a goodbye. "Off so pe you runs across some honest fishermens blease ask dem to hellup us oudt off our droubles. Dis island ve do nodt likes some at all, undt der sooner as ve gets avay der petter for everybody."

Along the contour of the shore the two boys picked their way, trying to carry themselves in a most natural fashion. Indeed, from time to time both of them stopped to delve in the sand for clams, having fetched a gunny-sack —formerly holding much of their provisions, but no longer needed for that purpose, because of the fast diminishing supply—for the purpose of carrying such shellfish prizes as they chanced to uncover.

They had actually managed to pick up half a bushel of large clams by the time they drew near the lagoon, and Tom was finding the

burden of the partly filled sack no light one. Then, pretending to discover the still smoking fire by which the four men had evidently cooked their breakfast, the boys acted as naturally as they knew how, showing signs of surprise, and delight and hurrying forward so as to reach the spot.

The smugglers hearing their loud and exultant cries came swarming out of the tent they used for sleeping quarters, to stare at the running boys, and then exchange low-spoken though excited words.

In this manner did Tom and his chum join the men, whom they pounced upon with seeming great happiness, insisting on shaking their rough hands, and saying how glad they were to know they might now expect to be taken off that miserable island, whenever the honest fishermen decided to leave.

Indeed, they gave the men little time to get any sort of grip on the situation, either Tom or Specs insisting on chattering away like a pair of magpies or parrots.

Of course the story had to be told, how a start was made for Cat Island, with the idea of going into camp there for a few days and nights, so that Tom might work his new radio

set, and try out some little ideas he had, like every other radio bug, been harboring and nursing in his scheming brain, waiting for a favorable opportunity to test the same.

Then came the account of the storm, and how it was discovered that another Gulfport boy had been asleep in the cabin of the catboat all that time. After that they told of the wreck, and the dramatic landing on the island, as proof of which they pointed out the *Bullbat,* still gripped by the sands of that beach on the northeast tip of the Island—and which, strange to say, none of the four men appeared to have noticed up to that moment.

Altogether the two boys held the center of the stage for quite some little time, so that the men really found no chance to do more than make some casual little remark, or exchange meaning glances among themselves.

They were not as rough-looking as might have been expected, and all of them were young men. Tom more than half suspected they might have seen service overseas in the army or navy; for he understood that the forces of smugglers along the whole Atlantic seaboard were being constantly augmented by men of the type long known as "soldiers of

fortune," whose reckless temperaments called for adventure in some shape or other, and nothing else cropping up they embarked in this rum-running game.

He had already come to the conclusion that one of them might be a West India Conch, for he talked like a cockney might, dropping his R's, and having a peculiar twist to his speech; a second he guessed was something along the Spanish line; while the other pair he knew without doubt must call the South their home, for both were built along the order of men of the North Carolina mountains, who had possibly been forced to leave home on account of too vigorous efforts of the revenue men; and found a congenial pursuit in beating the Government by this rum-running game.

Having reached the end of their story, and made out to be vastly delighted at meeting others on the island they had believed to be deserted, the boys waited to ascertain what sort of an impression all this had made on their auditors.

Suspicious and dark looks were being cast upon them, which seemed a bad sign, in the estimation of Specs. He managed to whisper confidentially to his pal, as if to find out

whether Tom felt the same discouragement as himself.

"Think they swallowed that fishy story, Tom?" was what he said, aside, as the men started talking among themselves, arguing about something that must of necessity concern the verity of the two lads.

"I'm afraid not," came the cautious reply, although Tom displayed not a trace of disappointment over the evident failure of their plan. "You see the fact of our having been ashore here all last night, and yesterday, hits our seeming to be so innocent and unsuspicious a hard knock. They figure that we're not so green as to be so close at hand, and not learn something about all that's been going on here."

Specs sighed.

"Then that knocks the stuffing out of our fine scheme," he muttered.

"It probably will," came Tom's diplomatic observation; "but for all of that it may pay us to keep it up right along. We mustn't let them know we're on to their game of tag, whatever else we do. So please look eager, and expectant, just like you hoped everything was bound to turn out gilt-edged, and we'd be on our way home, as soon as they could arrange

it. On my part I'm meaning to get them interested in radio, so as to keep the bunch in good humor. I'd a lot rather have them friendly, than ugly toward us; and I know what a soothing influence radio music has on easily ruffled tempers."

Specs nodded, for he realized that as always this chum of his was proving to be the possessor of a long head.

"I'm not going to call it a lost hope as long as you keep your wits about you, Tom," he affirmed; "but we're in the soup, all right, and if we manage to get out of this scrape—the worst by far we ever got tangled in—I'll throw up my hat, and whoop for joy."

So Tom forced himself again on the attention of the four men, it being his plan to keep them from consulting with one another all that was possible. He presently turned to Specs, hanging around and listening eagerly, to say:

"We're going to take these fishermen over to the camp now, Specs, where they'll meet our pal, Hop Hoofnagle, and have a look at my little radio kit. Seems like they've none of them ever had the pleasure of listening-in, and hearing what the voices of the air are carrying a thousand miles or so. In fact this tall

chap, who tells me his name is Jock Speffins, and that his home town is up in the old Tar State, says he thinks it is all a bunk game; and that it's a silly thing to believe anybody away down here on the Gulf could hear a man playing a fiddle up in New York, or a band playing over in Havana. So you see, Specs, it's going to be up to me to prove all I've been claiming; and tonight we're billed to have a regular concert, as well as listen to talks in half a dozen cities all over the South and North. I'll show these boys that radio is the seventh wonder of the world, or know the reason why, that's all."

## CHAPTER XVII

### PRISONERS OF THE RUM-RUNNERS

THE four smugglers had heard all that Tom was saying, but seemed to hardly know what he might have back of the words. Still, their curiosity had undoubtedly been fully aroused with regard to his earnest talk concerning the wonders of radio; and after exchanging significant nods and grins they gave the boys to understand that they were ready for a change of base.

Tom led the way, and in so doing had to come very close to the secret *cache*. But being on their guard neither of them betrayed the slightest interest in the matter; so far as looks and actions went they were absolutely ignorant of the presence of contraband stuff so near at hand.

Undoubtedly the men were covertly watching their guides, eager to catch them napping, if such a thing could be done; but without any success worth mentioning.

When presently they arrived at the camp they found Hop awaiting them, for he must have heard their voices, and prepared himself for his new job of playing the innocent. Indeed, that would not be such a hard task for the Hoofnagle kid, because it came quite natural to him to be unaffected and frank. There was a little danger he might go to extremes, and either force the watching men to consider him a simpleton; or else cause them to believe their suspicions well grounded, and that these boys knew too much to make it safe for them to leave the island of the gulf pirates.

There had already been quite sufficient talk concerning how they came to be cast upon Maximo; and in order to keep Hop from "butting in," with possibly serious results, Tom lost no time in riveting the attention of the four rough men on his humble radio outfit.

He tried to explain just how it worked, but soon realized that all he was saying, with various technical names for the working parts, was just like so much Greek, or Chictaw, to the quartette. So he tested to discover whether he could get a "rise" in the shape of a "whistle" at any wave length going.

It so chanced, by great good luck, that there was "something doing," as Tom termed it. A sudden turn of a dial brought a responsive sharp whistle, at which Tom hovered around trying desperately to tune in. Specs watched the faces of the interested men, and saw that while their wonder had naturally been excited they still were of the belief that all this business must be compared with the hocus-pocus of a county fair pretended magician. They were willing to be shown, however, which was one point gained.

Indeed, Specs felt that he could hardly blame them for being incredulous about one quarter of what Tom had told them so indifferently being the truth. Fancy an ignorant mountaineer from North Carolina looking down in contempt on a modest and unassuming home-made contraption, cased in an ordinary square cigar-box; and being told with no degree of humor whatever, that by means of it he could listen to a girl sing a song when she was a thousand, yes two thousand miles away, and so clearly, so strongly, that he could easily imagine she stood within ten feet of him!

Presently Tom removed the head phones, and made a move, looking to attaching the

same to the ears of the mountaineer. The other, however, dodged, and showed a reluctance to have any close acquaintance with the "devil's own contrivance," as he designated the radio.

However, the West India Conch proved more amiable, and was soon grinning as he drank in what was coming through the invisible agency of those wonderfully well harnessed air waves.

This aroused the interest of the remaining pair, who loudly clamored for a chance to have a turn. Tom accommodated them, and it was not long before they were showing signs of radio hunger, an eagerness to enlarge upon their brief acquaintance with twentieth century discoveries in the line of science.

Jock Speffins stood out as long as he could, but in the end threw up his hands in token of surrender. If his mates could find it so exciting and interesting, as they seemed to show, he felt that he ought not allow foolish qualms to stand in his way of sharing their entertainment.

Thus a good part of the morning was given up to this sort of thing. Tom felt as though in duty bound not to spare time or energy, if

by such an expenditure he could only gain the good will of those rough smugglers, and help to muffle their early suspicions.

He wanted them to become more or less infatuated with the game, and for numerous reasons other than those which he shared with Specs. And in order to further add to their mystification he went through all sorts of queer stunts, which Specs very well knew had absolutely nothing to do with the working of the double-tube little portable set. Thus Tom occasionally waved both hands, as though mutely conjuring the spirits of the air to obey his will, just as if he might be a medicine-man of some savage tribe, or a magician facing a critical and skeptical audience in some vast theater.

At one time he even brought out a telegraph sounder, and started clicking its key with exceeding great gusto; though this caused a semblance of a grin to creep over the freckled face of Specs, because it looked so ridiculous in his experienced eyes.

That proved to be only another occasion wehn Specs failed to gauge the capacity of Tom Turner for building up a skillful plan of campaign; Specs was apt to learn some-

thing that would give him a decided shock, before he was many hours older.

Finally there was nothing in the air that even Tom's most efficient manipulation of the dials could chain.

He turned a smiling face toward his audience, and went on to say:

"We'll have to postpone the balance of our programme until after dark, when I can give you anything you want, all the way through a dozen cities North and South. You will hear the announcer tell what the station is; where located in a certain city; and the programme for the evening. I can show you a printed list of all the principal broad-casting stations in the whole country, from which we can take our pick. If there isn't too much static in the air, coming from its condition; and if there's no electrical storm within a hundred miles, to spoil things for us, we ought to have a wonderful entertainment. So we'll close shop till then, boys."

The men did not hurry away, as Tom had hoped would be the case. Instead of doing so they clustered together, and commenced talking in low tones. None of the boys made out to be particularly interested in their actions,

though Tom occasionally would shoot a side glance that way; and once he raised his heavy eyebrows suggestively in a way that spelled troublous times, as near as Specs could make out.

Then one of the men approached Tom; it was Jock Speffins, the sturdy young North Carolina mountaineer, and he was eyeing Tom in a pugnacious fashion.

"Me'n my mates we ain't meanin' yuh no harm," he went on to say, in his rough voice, but with a glint of his cold eyes that stood for much besides; "but we all thinks as how yuh fellers had ort tuh come down tuh our camp, an' spend the arternoon wi' us. Turn about's fair play, they sez, an' we be'n hyar mos' all mawnin'. All you-uns come 'long wi we-uns, says we."

Tom knew what that meant. They were under suspicion, and must be watched every minute of the time. He only hoped it would not go any further than that, and rough treatment be brought into play.

"Well, we haven't any objections to returning your visit, boys, seeing that you've promised to come up here again after night sets in. But we hope you've got plenty of grub on

hand, because our supplies are running mighty short, and I had to set some snares yesterday, though I haven't thought to visit the same this morning to see what my success was. P'raps one of you might take a turn around with me later on, and find out if we have got any fresh meat. Since we are to stop with you for a spell, till you can arrange to run us over to the mainland, where we can take a train for Gulfport, it's only fair for us all to pool our food resources."

That was said with an utter air of frankness and confidence, well calculated to brush aside such cobwebs of doubt as might be gathering in the slow moving brains of the quartette of smugglers. But if Tom was putting his faith in anything he could say to bring about the result they longed to achieve, it was not manifest in his speech or actions, as Specs could readily believe.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CAMP STEW IS SERVED

"KEEP Hop under your eye, Specs," was what Tom Turner managed to whisper to his best chum, while they were all walking down to the camp of the four smugglers; though he managed to keep looking ahead, and spoke without apparently moving his lips.

"All right, Tom," came the guarded answer; "but suppose you tell me why."

"You know what a simple boob Hop can be when he's in the hands of any one as clever and suspicious as that tallest fellow they call Caleb. Why, unless he caught you frowning at him, he'd be sure to let something drop that'd give the game away as flat as a piece of hoecake. We'll both keep warning him to button up his lips, and talk as little as can be helped."

At least it cheered both Hop and that other great eater, Specs, to see how their entertainers had no lack of supplies in their larder—such as they were—not at all in the same class as the things Tom and his pals had fetched on

their trip, taken from the several homes—but nevertheless quite attractive in the eyes of always hungry boys.

Specs insisted on making the fire, but did not dare suggest testing out any of his various "matchless" devices, acquired through a deep study of old Indian ways with flint and steel—the grinding process with his little bow and apparatus, as practiced on some islands of the Southern Sea; or other methods equally unique.

It seemed that the young Tarheel mountaineer, Jock Speffins, was the cook of the camp; but his clumsy way of going about things merited the supreme scorn of a bright camper like Specs.

The latter could be very ingratiating when he chose, and so he managed to give the other more or less practical assistance, as well as not a few hints of a helpful nature, without incurring his ill-will.

In due time they sat down to quite a bountiful spread, to which every one did full justice. Indeed, they chatted in an off-hand way as they ate, and outwardly everything seemed to be as "happy as the marriage bell," to use an expression that Specs passed along to Tom,

when helping the other to a third cup of so-called coffee.

Nevertheless, both of them knew very well they had only managed to temporarily lull the suspicions of the smugglers. Frequently they caught suggestive looks and winks being exchanged, that told plainly enough the men were still watching closely, with the hope of catching some boy off his guard; when, as Specs again would have said in his original way, "the beans would have been spilled."

Tom had not forgotten what he told Jock Speffins concerning his snares; and when time began to hang heavy during the early part of the afternoon he mentioned the subject again, asking the other if he cared to make the rounds of the trap-line in his company.

This seemed to strike the lanky young mountaineer agreeably, and accordingly the pair started forth; but not before Tom managed to give Specs a suggestive wink, at the same time jerking his thumb backward toward Hop. The innocent was sitting with his back braced against a box, and his heavy head occasionally dropping upon his breast, showing that he was up to his old tricks, and surrendering to that everlasting drowsiness that pursued him.

It was a bit warm at that hour of the day, but with a sea breeze toning up the air Tom felt invigorated, and full of vim. He also enjoyed the quaint way Jock had of expressing himself; under ordinary conditions it would not have been difficult for Tom, himself a good "mixer," to have taken quite a fancy for the slab-sided mountaineer, who after a fashion had many good points.

But the other was engaged in a shady business, of breaking the laws of his own country, a fact Tom could not easily overlook; and besides this there were times when he could detect a glint, as of steel, in the pale eyes of Jock. This told him of the half savage instincts born in Jock's kind—that he belonged to one of the moonshine-making, mountain vendetta breed, that have made North Carolina take a prominent part in all newspaper stories of desperate family feuds.

Tom Turner was a clever hand at remembering localities, and once he visited any spot could always find it again. He had a faculty, possessed by those old-time forest rangers of the Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton type, brought to the front in Cooper's "Leatherstocking" tales—of making a mental map of

his course while roaming the woods and glades, so that at any time it would be possible for him to retrace his steps, even though the trail be washed out by rain.

So he took Jock Speffins from snare to snare, as though he himself had covered the entire line dozens of times, making it familiar tramping ground. In the second snare they found a luckless victim, for a fat bunny was hanging head down, and kicking briskly, its left hind leg being caught in a loop of a cord that in turn was fastened to the end of a stiff sapling, which Tom had bent over, and lightly secured with a peg driven into the ground.

Jock, recognizing skillful work in the affair, was not sparing of his homely praise. From his manner it was plain to be seen that the Gulfport lad had risen several degrees in his estimation.

The next two traps had not been disturbed, and Jock examined Tom's method of arranging them, as though it tickled his sense of appreciation. It would be difficult to teach a mountain boy anything along the line of trapping small wild animals, since that has been his daily occupation each succeeding season since he "was knee-high to a duck;" but at the

same time every trapper, whether amateur or professional, may have some little original wrinkle well worth noting.

Another prize was taken in the very last snare, which fact caused both Tom and his companion considerable pleasure, since now they would have an abundance of fresh meat to make sufficient rabbit stew for the whole party—and remembering the prodigious appetites displayed by both Hop and Specs, not to mention the four strapping men, Tom realized what this meant.

He noticed that many times as they walked, chancing to come to places where an unobstructed view could be had of the open gulf, Jock seemed impelled to lift a hand, so as to shield his eyes from the glaring sun, mountain-fashion, and sweep the horizon as far as it was visible, to the east, north and west.

It gave Tom food for thought, since he felt almost certain his was not a regular habit on the part of the mountaineer. Was he looking for signs of that rum-carrier boat, returning with another cargo of contraband; or could it be a feeling of uneasiness that possessed him—a plaguing thought in the way of almost expecting to glimpse some swift Government

boat crowded with stern revenue men, heading for Maximo Island, and bent of scooping up himself and companions, as well as capturing what remained of the *cache's* contents?

They returned to camp, proudly exhibiting the results of the expedition; and Jock had the fur flying in a jiffy, showing what an expert hand he could claim to be about skinning game.

Tom gave Specs an inquiring look, which the other rightly interpreted, for he nodded his head reassuringly, as if to inform his pal that so far "everything was lovely, and the goose hanging high"—that Hop had put in most of the lazy afternoon thus in dozing; so that none of the men found a chance to get him aside, and "pump" him.

In the general conversation that was kept up from time to time, the boys were given to understand their entertainers were actually part of a fishing gang employed by a well known packer and shipper in Apalachicola. They had been sent on in advance, and the balance of the gang might be expected to come along at any day, fetching all the nets and necessary paraphernalia peculiar to their calling—this latter point being emphasized, as if

to account for the utter absence of such customary adjuncts to any well ordered fishing camp, which they guessed these keen-eyed boys must surely have noticed before then.

It was plain enough to Tom that the men looked on the whole affair as a big joke, judging from the suggestive winks and nods they exchanged while in turn adding further particulars to this yarn. They no longer suspected the marooned lads of having any connection with the Government enforcement agents who covered the Gulf coast with their increasing activities, and kept smugglers pretty much on the jump with their raids; but they did believe Tom and his mates must have penetrated their real character, and might know enough to give the game away, were they permitted to reach the mainland.

The sun sank low, and night was now approaching.

There began to be a suggestive and decidedly appetizing odor in the air, for the stew was boiling furiously, onions and potatoes having been added in generous proportions, so that the huge iron pot was more than two-thirds full of the savory mess.

Hop and Specs kept moving about like caged tigers, unable to keep still; nor was Tom unaware of the real reason; that appealing scent had gotten them almost frantic with a desire to "pitch in;" and they counted the minutes as dragging along, weighted with lead.

Finally the platters, together with the battered tin cups, were fetched out, and supper pronounced ready. Hot as the stew proved to be, they were so nearly famished that nothing could deter them from starting in. It was pronounced gilt-edged by every one of the company; Hop in particular, not being accustomed to camp-fare, was loud in praise of the mess, and vowed he had never in all his young life tasted anything one-half so good.

"Undt pelieve me, poys," he assured his mates, while the four men listened with wide grins at his quaint way of putting things; "me for dor outdoors lifes after dis, you pet my boots on dot. Tom, vould you blease pile oop mine plate once more yet; seems like I could nefer get enough of dese elegant stews."

## CHAPTER XIX

### A THRILLING MOMENT

NIGHT was just settling over the gulf, and a faint pink glow still hung in the western sky, when Tom led the way once more to their own camp, the others following close at his heels. Specs was thrilled with some species of elation he himself could not just understand; but which seemed to follow an expressive look Tom Turner had given him, when proposing that they adjourn, and listen-in to a radio concert.

He had a wildly surging inspiration that Tom must have conceived some splendid project, that, if only successfully carried out,

Between times Tom kept industriously hammering away at his telegraph key, making a conglomeration of speedy dots and dashes that almost set the nerves of Specs—a fairly good operator himself—on edge. It even looked as though Tom believed he could not coax his set to behave, and do good service,

without this frequent application of his clicking telegraph key.

Hop realized that he was not included in this night's concert—that it was to be wholly devoted to the entertainment of the four smugglers, whom they must look upon as their guards. He lay there, partly leaning against a block of wood picked up on the beach, and gradually losing himself in slumber, as his closed eyes betrayed.

Not only once but several times one of the men would get up and leave the camp. Tom noticed that on his return he would shake his head in a negative way; just as though a look of inquiry from certain of his mates required such an answer. And the boy could easily understand how he had been sent to ascertain whether any light, proceeding from some on-coming boat, was to be seen over the waste of water.

When they were through with Havana, Tom switched off, and easily tuned-in on the splendid program that was coming through WEAF. He managed to keep things going, and by carefully watching the faces of the men prevented any exhibition of impatience, or ill will. Indeed, he had them in an unusually

jovial state of mind, judging from the roars of laughter that broke out occasionally, when humorous numbers were interspersed with the gay music, or chatter of the director of the Capitol Theatre in New York City.

Specs himself had begun to weary of it all, and found himself allowing his thoughts to wander far afield. Perhaps it was only natural for the boy to see again in his mind's eye the well remembered homestead, where those dear ones of his family group lived—he could picture the customary circle around the evening light in the living room—his mother, with her sewing, her beloved face now furrowed with the anxiety that knocked at her heart because of dreadful fears concerning the safety of her boy; father smoking his favorite pipe as he read his evening paper, now and then glancing cautiously over its top in the direction of his wife and helpmeet, and doubtless himself sorely heavy-laden with oppressive thoughts, as well as sympathy for mother; then his sisters, Sue and Barbara, allowed to sit up later than customary, for some reason or other, the one playing with her dolls, and Sue engrossed in her favorite storybook.

No wonder, then, that a heavy sigh welled up from poor Specs' heart, as he realized how much worry and anxiety his absence was undoubtedly causing those devoted parents; what would he not have given for some magical way to communicate with them—to assure them he was well, even if prevented by circumstances beyond his control from returning to his home!

There was Tom once more going through that silly pretense with his old telegraph key, making those foolish sounds, while the four eager men waited for a continuation of their novel enjoyment. What could Tom mean by carrying on such claptrap doings, wasting his time, Specs told himself loftily, when surely it was altogether unnecessary, even though the smugglers were foolish enough to allow themselves to be thus humbugged, bamfgoozled, and deceived by such tomfoolery?

With a frown Specs settled down once more, hoping to again conjure up pleasing visions of the home picture—if only Tom would quit his senseless rattling of that telegraph key, which was getting on his, Specs', nerves with its constant pounding.

Specs had succeeded in partly rebuilding his imaginary habitation, and was fast falling into

his previous dreamy condition, when all at one he had a thrill. His eyes opened wide, and he started.

The four men were still on edge, waiting for Tom to transfer the head phones to them, after he had completed his grotesque appeasing of the unseen air spirits that were evidently hovering aloft.

But the droning of the telegraph key had taken on a new character—it was no longer just an indiscriminate jumble of sounds, such as a greenhorn might bring forth when pounding away without rhyme or reason.

The sharp clicks meant something now—they were coming regularly, if swiftly, just as Tom and he were accustomed to talking to one another over their private line connecting their two homes.

Over and over again did Specs read the one word, sent out as he suddenly understood over the radio, through a clever trick brought about by Tom, when he arranged his set from aerial to ground wire.

"Help! help! help!"

That was what the clicking sounds were saying—that was what was passing through the air, to be picked up by any operator who

chanced to be on the same wave length, just at that minute! The wonderful truth flashed through the agitated mind of Specs like a burning bolt—why, Tom must have had this particular thrilling device in his mind all the time; he had fetched that telegraph key along to test out its value while on Cat Island, and see if he could broadcast after an amateur fashion, so that in due time he would get a post card from some boy, away up in Pennsylvania it might be, telling how he had picked up his message, and wished to let him know of his success!

And now, after having paved the way, and lulled all suspicions on the part of their captors to rest by his frequent use of the key, there he was sending out the call for help.

"Bully boy, Tom," Specs was whispering to himself, at the same time trying his best not to betray how excited he felt.

Now Tom changed his pace—other words were flowing, and Specs read on.

"Help! help! help! Marooned on Maximo Island—smugglers rendezvous—tell Lieut Davis to come—let our folks in Gulfport know —Tom Turner sending! Help us—quick!"

## CHAPTER XX

### SAVED BY RADIO—CONCLUSION

SPECS glanced once more around the circle of men, this time in deadly fear lest one of them might by chance have been a telegraph operator at some time in his past, and thus comprehend the clever method Tom had taken to send out this appeal for help.

But he saw nothing to cause alarm. And Tom was already separating the head phones, so as to give a portion to Jock, and the balance to Caleb, as it chanced to be their turn.

Specs no longer felt in a mood to turn back to his former occupation; he was thrilled with new and eager hopes and fears; and could do nothing save watch Tom—Tom, who just then seemed imbued with all the attributes of a veritable wizard, such as those credulous fellows actually thought him to be.

Later on, when an opportunity presented itself, Tom, casually remarking that as the concert was getting "weaker," with more or less "static" breaking in, he guessed he had better

"wind things up again;" with which he started his old game of rattling that telegraph key, quickly switching on to his call for help, and repeating his former heart-rending appeal.

Thus it went during the entire evening, and on six different occasions was the call for aid sent out into the wide spaces. The night was now wearing on, and hours had passed since they came from the other camp. Tom had given his audience a taste from a variety of programmes, for he seemed able to tune-in at will almost anywhere, from Fort Worth, Texas, Detroit, Pittsburgh, New York, Schnectady, Atlanta, and many other lesser stations that nightly entertained countless thousands of listeners with their very best efforts.

Then Jock, coming hurriedly back after being away for some minutes, must have fetched important news, for the men all arose, as if ready to depart. They had apparently arranged a plan for keeping the boys in their own camp, when anything was going on which it was not advisable they should see; for one of the men remained behind, his duty being to make sure there would be no spying done.

But it was impossible to stuff the ears of the boys with cotton, so as to shut out all sounds; and a short time later they easily caught the unmistakable drone of an approaching airplane, by which they knew the visitor of the preceding night was returning doubtless intending to pick up another cargo of contraband.

There was no longer any need to hide the fact of their knowing what was going on; so they did not try. They could easily tell when the smuggling plane landed, and some time later they again heard the whirr of its propeller, and the sound of its powerful engine working, as it took off. Indeed, Tom standing up could see the speeding light as it passed off, heading toward the coast line that was faintly visible only in the daytime.

The guard made himself comfortable, as though meaning to spend the entire night with them. Hop was dead to the world, and Tom had taken the trouble to spread the old red blanket over his huddled-up figure. Specs also, considering that it was useless lying awake any longer, was sprawled out under his own special covering. Tom sat up for still a spell, talking with the smuggler, whom he found

to be quite a decent sort of a chap after all, and who assured him they meant no harm, only they could not let Tom and his chums get away, so long as the island was being used as a rendezvous for their business associates.

Later on that same night Tom knew that some sort of boat had arrived, although unaware as to its character. He could guess it may have been the same one that fetched a cargo of cases on the previous occasion, having made a speedy passage to some other depot of supplies, and returned once more.

Lying there he was interested, also thrilled, to hear the murmur of voices, accompanied by other still more suspicious sounds; also to realize that he and his companions were passing through most amazing adventures, prisoners as they were of bold smugglers, and held on a pirate island as famous as any known to American history.

It was a long lonely night, but morning broke at length; though Tom really had had but a scant allowance of decent sleep for his portion. Specs woke up, and thought it wise to arouse Hop, who had not uttered a sound all through those hours, and of course knew nothing concerning the wild hope the others

were hugging to their hearts, connected with the possible coming of a rescue party, summoned by means of Tom's wide-spread radio appeal, couched in the Morse code.

That seemed an almost endless day, so nervous were both Tom and Specs. They decided it was not wise to take artless Hop Hoofnagle into secret; because he had always been such a poor sort of an actor, he was likely to be unequal to the task of playing a part, and looking downcast, when in reality his heart was beating with high hopes.

Tom admitted that he felt sorry "mean" was the expression he actually used; but in such a case the end must be considered, rather than the means—it was only another adaptation of the new slogan "safety first;" and far better than poor dull-witted Hop continue to believe there was no chance of a rescue party coming to Maximo Island, than that they run the risk of his ruining all Tom's plans by an undue exuberance of spirits.

Nothing happened all that day—that is nothing out of the way. They found little chance to be out of the sight of at least one of their captors; and much of the time all of the men hovered around. At noon and supper-

time also they ate in the company of the smugglers, who were kind enough to invite them to share their meals, even knowing as they did the enormous capacity as feeders both Hop and Specs possessed; which, as Tom declared with a grin, was "some generous" of the quartette.

Thus came another night; and having already had a good taste of the delights of radio entertainment, the men were clamoring for a further free demonstration of Tom's abilities as a man entertainer.

Again did Hop peacefully doze, while Tom proceeded as on the previous night, to make frequent use of his telegraph key; and on every occasion he invariably wound up his staccato rattling with that same fervent appeal for help, sent broadcast to whatever listeners might be able to catch the same, and interpret the meaning of the dots and dashes.

Specs felt no inclination to doze, or even allow his thoughts to roam in the direction of the distant peaceful home rooftree, while all this exciting programme, conducted in such a clever way by Tom, was going on. If their lucky star was in the ascendant, some time, sooner or later, that direct appeal must reach

sympathizing ears, and be rightly interpreted; then communications would be opened with Tom's father, whose name would be found in any telephone directory where Gulfport was included; so that eventually Lieutenant Davis of the Government marine service must be informed concerning the illegal use to which Maximo Island was being put.

As before it was not until late that the smugglers consented to Tom calling off his entertainment, and shutting up shop, so infatuated were they with what was being brought to their ears through such a mysterious channel.

Between that time and daylight Tom felt certain another vessel came and went, perhaps one of those smaller speed boats that could slip in and out of the devious passages along the coast, vanishing from the sight of watching service men as though in truth a will-o'-the-wisp, or what a sailor of the old days would term a Flying Dutchman, or *Fata Morgana.*

This brought them to another day—what a long and dreary stretch it seemed since they started forth so merrily on this ill-fated cruise.

Noon came and went, with nothing breaking the dull monotony. Then along about the

middle of the afternoon Tom, being on the lookout, made a discovery that sent him back toward camp in haste, to whisper something to his comrades, and cause both boys to trail after him, the guard fortunately chancing to be dozing at that particular time.

Tom had during the interim found a snug hidingplace, where they might easily remain concealed, should a rescue party land on the island, and it was to this *niche* that he now led his chums.

They had no sooner concealed themselves back of the screen of vines that hung like a curtain across the face of a miniature cliff, than by certain loud shouts they realized how the smugglers must have discovered the approaching boat, and not recognizing it as one of their regular customers, were hastily searching for the boys, meaning to keep them out of sight, lest they give the truth away to any parties who might land.

Some time passed, and of course the boys were becoming very anxious as well as mightily concerned. Then hearing voices close by, Tom peeped from their covert and made a most illuminating discovery; for several men, who had an official look, were searching amidst the

bushes, one, whom Specs recognized immediately as his father's friend, Lieutenant Davis, began calling "Tom Turner in a loud voice."

Since everything seemed propitious, out popped Tom, followed by Specs and the overjoyed Hop, to meet with a hearty reception from the revenue men, and learn first of all that their parents had been advised of their safety. The radio call for help had reached friendly ears, and been relayed to Gulfport, just as scheming Tom had anticipated might be the case; with the result that Lieutenant Davis was wired, and put in possession of important facts calculated to spell trouble for those bold spirits using Maximo Island as a trading post in their infamous dealings in contraband.

Of course Jock Speffins and his three mates submitted without any desperate struggle when they found themselves up against the Government officers. They could not understand just how the revenue boat came directly to Maximo, as though in full possession of the truth, nor was Tom unduly eager to explain how his manipulating of that old telegraph key had been the means of sending out a call for help.

It was concluded to dispatch the three boys to the mainland in the small power-boat left with the men; while the revenue officers concealed their own craft, and lay in wait, ready to gobble up any suspicious vessel, whether of the sea or of the air, that came along after nightfall.

And so it was that despite the lateness of the hour, Tom and his chums bundled their possessions into the small power-boat, which one of the officers agreed to run across to the mainland, leaving them within reaching distance of the railroad, so that they might take the first train home.

As the boat puttered on its way, the three adventurous lads looked back toward Maximo Island, upon which the westering sun was slanting its rays; and agreed that never would they forget the thrilling events with which they had found themselves confronted while camped on its hospitable shores.

The excitement attending the homecoming of Tom and his two companions can be left to the imagination of the reader; but undoubtedly home looked dearer to each one of the young adventurers than ever before in all their lives.

On the following morning, as Tom was starting down Main Street on an errand for his mother, he chanced to run across Hop Hoofnagle, whose round face was beaming with pride and happiness. Naturally Tom, remembering how the other had worried himself almost sick concerning the episode of the letter, and his inability to remember whether he had really posted the same, or lost it, asked concerning the solution of the matter.

"By shinks!" exclaimed Hop, "dot vos only some foolishnesses py me, Tom, old scouts; sure I mailed dot letter, yoost as I dinks me so often. You pet my life I vos glad to hear mudder say Fadder he gets him an answer quick off der reel to his letter, undt vent down der next night to take dinner with Doc Horseman, as iss der druggist, you know. You see, dey iss partners in a little chicken ranch oudt in der gountry; undt der Doc he vants to consult apout a new breed of fowls he reads so mooch apout in der babers. Idt makes me laugh out loudt to think dot I haf me so mooch drouples apout dot silly letter, vich he dells me vos so important. It iss going to take me a whole month to make oop the sleep I loses me over dot letter, Tom, oldt chum."

So, since Tom eventually managed to recover the grounded *Bullbat,* it appeared that everything came out all right; besides this, the three lads had had an experience along the Robinson Crusoe line they would never forget as long as they lived.

That so enterprising a fellow as Tom Turner, backed by his ardent admirer and pal, Specs Whittleby, should likely enough run athwart further adventures, while pursuing these investigations of his favorite pursuit in the line of radio secrets, can readily be imagined; and possibly later on the writer may be induced to again undertake the pleasing task of whipping some of these more recent happenings into another thrilling yarn, with which to regale the readers of this story; until which time he must say goodby.

THE END.

Tom Turner's Adventures with the Radio